

HORDUBAL

Other Books by Karel Čapek

Illustrated

PRESIDENT MASARYK TELLS HIS STORY
(Recounted by Karel Čapek)

THE GARDENER'S YEAR
(Sixth Impression)

FAIRY TALES

DASHENKA
(Second Impression)

With Josef Čapek
ADAM THE CREATOR
A Comedy in Six Scenes

H O R D U B A L

by

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BOOK I

THAT 'man sitting second from the window, the one with his clothes all creased; who'd think that he's an American? Don't tell me! Surely Americans don't travel in slow trains; they go with the express, and even then it's not fast enough for them, the trains are quicker in America they say, with much bigger carriages, and a white-coated waiter brings you iced water and ice-creams, don't you know? Hello, boy, he shouts, fetch me some beer, bring a glass for everyone in the carriage, even if it costs five dollars, damn it! Good Lord! That's life in America, you know: it's no use trying to tell you.

The second one from the window dozed with his mouth open, all sweaty and tired, and his head hung down as if he were lifeless. Oh, God, oh, God, it's already eleven, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen days; for fifteen days and nights sitting on my box, sleeping on the floor, or on a bench, sticky with sweat, stupefied, and deafened with the rattle of the machines; this is the fifteenth day; if only I could stretch my legs, put a bundle of hay under my head and sleep, sleep, sleep . . .

The fat Jewess by the window squeezed herself gingerly into the corner. That's it, at the end he'll go off, and fall on me like a sack; who knows what's wrong with him—looks as if he's rolled on the ground in his clothes, or something; you seem a bit queer to me, I should say, I should like to move right away, oh, God, if only the train would stop! And the man, second from the window, nodded, bent forward, and woke with a jerk.

"It's so hot," said the little old man, looking like a hawker, cautiously beginning a conversation. "Where are you going to?"

"To Kriva," the man got out with an effort.

"To Kriva," repeated the hawker professionally, and graciously "And have you come far, a long way?"

The man second from the window made no reply, he only wiped his moist forehead with his grimy fist, and felt faint with weakness and giddiness. The hawker gave an offended snort and turned back towards the window. The other hadn't the heart to look through the window, he fixed his eyes on the filth on the floor, and sat waiting for them to ask him again. And then he would tell them. A long

way. All the way from America, sir. What do you say, all the way from America? And so you are coming all this distance for a visit? No, I'm going home. To Kriva. I have a wife there, and a little girl; she's called Hafia. She was three years old when I went away. So that's it, from America! And how long were you there? Eight years. It's eight years now. And all the time I had a job in one place: as a miner. In Johnstown. I had a mate there; Michal Bobok was his name. Michal Bobok from Talamas. It killed him; that was five years ago. Since then I've had no one to talk to—I ask you, how was I to make myself understood? Oh, Bobok, he learned the lingo; but, you know, when a chap has a wife, he thinks how he'll tell her one thing after another, and you can't do that in a strange tongue. She's called Polana.

And how could you do your job there when you couldn't make yourself understood? Well, like this: they just said, Hello, Hordubal, and they showed me my job. I earned as much as seven dollars a day, sir, seven. But living's dear in America, sir. You can't live even on two dollars a day—five dollars a week for bed. And then the gentleman opposite

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says: But then, Mr. Hordubal, you must have saved a nice tidy bit! Oh, yes, you could save. But I sent it home to my wife—did I tell you that she's called Polana? Every month, sir, fifty, sixty, and sometimes ninety dollars. I could do that while Bobok was alive, because he knew how to write. A clever man, that Bobok was, but he got killed five years ago; some wooden beams fell on him. Then I couldn't send any more money home, and I put it in a bank. Over three thousand dollars, I tell you, sir, and they stole it from me. But that's impossible, Mr. Hordubal! What did you say? Yes, sir, over three thousand dollars. And you didn't prosecute them? Now I ask you, how could I prosecute them? Our foreman took me to some kind of a lawyer; he patted my shoulder O.K., O.K., but you must pay in advance, and the foreman told him he was a swine, and pushed me down the stairs again. It's like that in America, no use talking Jesus Christ, Mr. Hordubal, three thousand dollars! That's a big sum of money, it's a whole fortune, God in Heaven, what bad luck! Three thousand dollars, how much is that in our money?

Juraj Hordubal felt a deep satisfaction: You'd all

turn and look at me, all you people here, if I began to tell you; people would rush from all over the train to look at a man who had three thousand dollars stolen in America. Yessir, that's me. Juraj Hordubal raised his eyes, and looked round at the people; the fat Jewess pressed herself into the corner, the hawker seemed to be offended, and looked out of the window, working his jaws, and an old woman, with a basket on her lap, eyed Hordubal as if she disagreed with something.

Juraj Hordubal closed up again. All right then, it's all the same, I needn't worry about you; for five years I've not spoken to a soul, and I managed that. And so, Mr. Hordubal, you're coming back from America without a cent? Oh, no, I had a good job, but I didn't put my money in the bank again, you bet! In a box, sir, and the key under my shirt, that's how it was. Seven hundred dollars I'm taking home. Well, sir, I would have stayed there, but I lost my job. After eight years, sir. Locked out, sir. Too much coal, or something. From our pit six hundred were given leave, sir. And everywhere and everywhere there was nothing but people being sent away. No job for a man anywhere. That's why I'm coming

back. Going home, you know. To Kriva. I have a wife there and some land. And Hafia, she was three then I have seven hundred dollars under my shirt, and once more I shall begin to farm, or I shall work in a factory. Or fell trees.

And then, Mr. Hordubal, weren't you lonely without your wife and child? Lonely? My God! But I ask you, I sent them money, and I kept thinking, this will buy a cow, this an acre of land, this something for Polana, but she'll know herself what to buy. Every dollar was for something. And the money in the bank, that was enough for a herd of cows. Yess'r, and they pinched it from me. And did she ever write to you, your wife? She didn't. She can't write. And did you write to her? No, sir, can't write, sir. Ever since that Michal Bobok died I haven't sent her anything. I only put the money by. But at least you telegraphed to her that you were coming? What for, why, why waste money on that? It would give her a turn if she got a telegram, but she won't get it from me. Ha, ha, what do you think! Perhaps she thinks you're dead, Mr. Hordubal; don't you think, if she hasn't heard a word from you for so many years---? Dead? A chap like me, dead!

Juraj Hordubal glanced at his knotted fists. A fellow like that, what an idea! Polana is sensible, she knows that I'm coming back. After all, we're all mortal; what if Polana is no longer alive? Shut up, sir; she was twenty-three when I went, and strong, sir, as strong as a horse—you don't know Polana; with that money, with those dollars I kept sending her, with those she wouldn't be alive? No, thank you.

The hawker by the window scowled and mopped his brow with a blue handkerchief. Perhaps he'll say again: It's so hot! Hot, sir! You call this hot? You ought to be on the lower deck, sir; or below in the shaft for anthracite. They put niggers down there, but I stood it, yess'r. For seven dollars. Hello, Hordubal! Hello, you niggahs! Yes, sir, a man can stand a lot. Not horses. They couldn't send any more horses down below to haul the trucks. Too hot, sir. Or the lower deck on the boat. . . . A fellow can stand a lot if only he can make himself understood. They want something from you, you don't know what; and they shout, get into a temper, shrug their shoulders. Now I ask you, how could I find out in Hamburg how to get to Kriva? They can shout, but I can't. To go to America's nothing;

someone puts you on the boat, someone waits for you there—but back, sir, nobody will help you. No, sir. It's a hard job to get home, sir.

And Juraj Hordubal nodded his head, then it nodded by itself, heavily and listlessly, and Juraj fell asleep. The fat Jewess by the window turned up her nose, the old woman with the basket on her lap and the offended hawker glanced at each other knowingly Oh, oh, that's what people are like now: like cattle——

II

Who's that there, who's that on the other side of the valley? Look at him; a gentleman, wearing shoes, perhaps he's an engineer, or something like that, he's carrying a black box, and trudges up the hill—if he weren't so far away, I'd put my hands to my mouth and halloo to him: Praised be Jesus Christ, sir, what's the time? Two minutes past twelve, my friend; if you weren't so far away I'd shout and ask whose cows you're minding, and then perhaps you'd point and say: That with the white patch on her face, that red and white, that one with the star, that roan, and this heifer belong to Polana Hordubal. Well, well, my lad, they're nice cows, a pleasure to look at; only don't let them get down to Black Brook, the grass is sour there, and the water's foul. Just think of that, to Polana Hordubal; and before she'd only got two cows; and what about it, boy, hasn't she got some oxen as well? Good Lord, and what sort of oxen, from Podoli, with horns spreading out like arms; two oxen, sir. And any sheep? Both rams and ewes, sir, but they are grazing up on Durna

Polonina Polana is rich and clever And has she got a husband? Why do you wave your arms about like that? Polana has no husband? Oh, what a stupid fool, he doesn't recognize me, the man; he shades his eyes with his hand, and stands staring, staring as if he were a gate-post.

Juraj Hordubal felt his heart thumping right up in his throat, he had to stop, and catch his breath, ahah! ahah! It's too much, it's so sudden, it makes him shake like a man who has fallen into water: all of a sudden he's at home, he only stepped over that stony gully, and it overwhelmed him on all sides: yes, that gully was always there, that black-thorn bush was there, too, and even then it was scorched by the herdsman's fire, and again mullein flowers in the ravine, the road vanishes in the dry grass, and in the dry thyme, here is that boulder grown over with bilberries, gentian, junipers, and the border of the wood, dry cow droppings, and the forsaken hay-hut, there is no America any more, eight years have vanished; everything is as it was, a shiny beetle on the head of a thistle, smooth grass, and far away the sound of cow-bells, the pass behind Knva, the brown clumps of sedges, and the way home,

a road trodden by the soft steps of mountain men, who wear home-made shoes and have never been to America, a road smelling of cows and of the forest, warm like an oven, leading into the valley, a stony road, trampled down by farm animals, swampy near the springs, bumpy with stones; oh, Lord, what a fine footpath, as swift as a brook, soft with grass, crumbling with stone chips, squelching in the hollows, curving under the trees in the wood: no, sir, no clinker sidewalk that squeaks under your boot, like they have in Johnstown, no railings, no hosts of men tramping to the mine, not a soul anywhere, not a soul, only a road leading down, the stream, and the sound of the cow-bells, the way home, dropping downwards, the little bells of the calves, and beside the stream the blue wolf's bane——

Juraj Hordubal descended with long strides: What difference does a box make, what difference do eight years; this is the way home, it just takes you along, like the herd returning at dusk, with full udders, ting-tang from the cows, and the little bells of the calves: why not sit down here and wait till dusk, come into the village when the cow-bells are ringing, when the old grannies come out on to their

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doorsteps, and men lean on the fence: look, look, who's coming here? Why me—like a herd from the pasture—right into the open gate. Good evening, Polana, even I am not returning empty.

Or no, wait till dark, until God's cattle have gone, until everything has fallen asleep; then knock on the window, Polana! Polana! God in Heaven, who's there? It's me, Polana, so that you are the first to see me, glory to God! And where's Hafia? Hafia's asleep; am I to wake her? No, let her sleep. God be praised.

And Hordubal quickened his pace still more. Oh, Lord, a man does move when his thoughts run ahead of him! You can't keep pace with them, never mind how much you stretch your legs, your mind runs away in front, and has already reached the rowan-trees at the edge of the village, sshh, geese, sshh, and you're already at home. You ought to make a sound like a trumpet: where are you all, see who's coming, the American, tram-tara, you do gape, boys, hello! And now silence, here we are at home, Polana is in the yard beating out the flax, to steal up to her, and cover her eyes—Juraj! How did you recognize me, Polana? Glory to God, to think that I couldn't remember your hands!

Hordubal ran along the gully, unconscious of the box in his hand, there where all his America was packed up, the blue shirt, the Manchester dress, and the teddy-bear for Hafia. And this here, Polana, is for you, material for a frock, like they wear in America, a cake of scented soap, a handbag with a chain, and this, Hafia, is a flash-light, you press this button here, and it lights, and here I've got pictures for you—which I cut out of the newspapers—ach, lassie, I had lots and lots of them, for eight years I kept saving them up for you, any I came across; I had to leave them behind, I couldn't get any more into the suit-case. But wait, there are lots of other things in the box!

And here already, thank God, the road crosses the brook; no iron bridge, only stepping-stones, you have to jump from one to the other, and balance with your arms; ah, there by the roots of the alders we used to catch crayfish, with our trousers rolled up, wet right up to the shoulders; and is the crucifix still there at the bend of the road? Praise be to Jesus Christ, it is, leaning over the cart-track, soft with the warm dust, and smelling of cattle, straw, and corn; and Michalcuk's orchard fence must be here; yes, here

it is, grown over with elder and hazel as it was then, and tumble-down as it used to be; glory to the Lord, now we are in the village, safe and sound, Juraj Hordubal. And Juraj Hordubal stopped: Why the deuce has the box suddenly become so heavy, just to wipe the sweat off, and Jesus Maria, why didn't I wash myself at the brook, why didn't I take my razor out of the box, and the little mirror, and shave at the brook! I must look like a gipsy, like a tramp, like a robber; what if I go back and wash myself before I let Polana see me? But you can't do that now, Hordubal, they're looking at you from behind Michalcuk's fence, behind the ditch with burdocks a child is standing still and gaping. Shan't you call to him, Hordubal? Shan't you shout, hello you, are you one of Michalcuk's? And with a patter of bare feet the child took to flight.

Why not go right round the village, thought Hordubal, and come home by the back way? What an idea! They would rush at me: You there, what are you up to? Get off down the road or you'll be beaten! What's one to do, I must go right through the middle of the village; oh, God, if only that box didn't weigh so much! The face of a woman at the

window behind the geraniums, sunflowers gaping at you, an old woman pours out something in the yard, as if she had eyes in her back, the children stop and stare, look here, look here, there's a strange man coming, old Kyryl works his jaws, and doesn't even raise his eyes; one more stab to the heart, God be with us, and with bowed head we pass through the homestead gate.

Oh, you booby, how could you make such a mistake! Don't you see that this isn't Hordubal's wooden hut, stable, and barn made of logs; it's a real farm, a brick building, with slates on the roof, and in the yard an iron pump, an iron plough, and a set of iron harrows, why, a proper farm; quick, Hordubal, disappear quickly with that black box of yours, before the farmer comes and says: Now what are you looking for here? Good afternoon, didn't Polana Hordubal once live here? I'm sorry, sir, I don't know what I've done with my eyes.

Through the doorway Polana emerged, and stopped dead, as if turned to stone, with her eyes staring, and she pressed her hands firmly to her breast, as she breathed quickly and in gasps.

III

AND then Juraj Hordubal didn't know what to say: he had thought out so many opening phrases, why was it that none of them would do? He won't put his hands over Polana's eyes, he won't tap on the window at night, he won't return with the cow-bells tinkling, and with words of blessing; but dirty and unkempt he rushed in. Well, what wonder if a woman gets frightened? Even my voice would be strange and snuffed—Lord tell me what I can say with such an inappropriate voice!

Polana drew back from the entrance, she stepped back—too far, oh, Polana, I could have slipped past—and murmured with a voice which was hardly a voice, and hardly hers "Come in, I—I'll call Hafia" "Yes, Hafia, but before she comes I should like to put my hands on your shoulders, and say, Well, Polana, I didn't mean to frighten you; thank God, I'm home at last. And see, see how she's furnished the house. the bed's new, and deep with feathers, the table's new, and heavy, sacred pictures on the wall, well, my lad, even in America they don't have

it better: the floor's made of boards, and geraniums in the windows; you are a good manager, Polana! Very quietly Juraj Hordubal sat down on the box. Polana is clever, and she knows her way about; from what you can see you would think that she owns twelve cows, twelve or even more—Praise be to God, I didn't toil in vain; but the heat in the mine, my God, if you knew what a hell! Polana did not return; Juraj Hordubal felt uneasy somehow, like someone quite alone in a strange room. I will wait in the yard, perhaps I might wash in the meantime. Ah, pull my shirt off, and pump cold water over my shoulders, over my head, and hair, and splash about with the water, and neigh with pleasure, ha! but that would hardly be the thing to do, no, not yet, not yet; just a drop of water from the iron pump (there used to be a wooden coping here, a bucket on a pole, and that deep darkness below, and how damp and cool it felt when you leaned over the coping) (and this is like America, where the farmers have pumps like this) (with the full bucket into the cow-shed, and water the cows till their muzzles shine with dampness, and they snort loudly), with a drop of water he moistened his grimy handkerchief, and

wiped his forehead, hands, and neck. Ach, ah, that's nice and cool. He wrung the handkerchief out, and looked round for somewhere to hang it. No, not yet, we're not at home yet; and he pushed it, still wet, into his pocket

"Here's your father, Hafia," Hordubal heard someone say, and Polana pushed towards him a girl of eleven, with shy, pale blue eyes. "So you're Hafia," murmured Hordubal in embarrassment. (Ah, God, a teddy-bear for a big child like that!) and he wanted to stroke her hair, just with his fingers, Hafia; but the girl drew back, she squeezed herself against her mother, and kept her eyes fixed on the strange man "What do you say, Hafia?" said Polana harshly, giving the girl a push from behind. Oh, Polana, leave her alone—what if a child does get frightened! "Good evening," whispered Hafia, and turned away. Juraj suddenly began to feel queer and his eyes filled with tears, the child's face danced before him and grew dim, but, what's that—eh, oh, nothing, but I haven't heard 'good evening' for so many years "Come and see, Hafia," he said, hurriedly, "what I've brought for you"

"Go, you silly," said Polana, giving her a push.

Hordubal knelt down before the box, Mother of God, everything has got messed up during the journey! He searched for the electric lamp. Hafia will be astonished! "So you see, Hafia, you press this button here, and it lights." But what's wrong, it doesn't want to light; Hordubal pressed the button, turned the little thing round and round, and became filled with sadness. "What's wrong with it? Ah, perhaps it's dried up inside there where the electricity is—you know, it was so hot on the lower deck. Well, it did shine brightly, Hafia, like a little sun. But wait, I've got some pictures for you. Now you'll see something!" Hordubal fished from the box cuttings from the papers and magazines which he had placed between a few articles of clothing. "Come here, Hafia, this will show you what America looks like."

The girl writhed with embarrassment, and looked inquiringly towards her mother. Dryly and severely Polana motioned with her head: go! Timidly and unwillingly the child shuffled towards the tall, strange man. Oh, if only you could dash out of the door and run, run to Marica, Zofka, to the girls who there behind the barn are rolling a pleasant little puppy into a pillow——

"Look, Hafia, look at these ladies—and see here, see how these people are fighting with each other, ha, ha, what? That's football, you know, a game they play in America. And see here, look at these big houses——"

Hafia's shoulder was now touching his, and timidly she whispered. "And what's this?"

A wave of pleasure and emotion ran through Juraj Hordubal. See how the child is getting used to me already! "This . . . you know, this is Felix the cat."

"But it's a pussy," objected Hafia.

"Ha, ha, of course, it's a pussy! You are clever, Hafia! Yes, it's . . . a sort of American tom-cat, all right"

"And what's he doing?"

"There . . . he's licking a tin out, do you understand? a kind of milk tin. It's an advertisement for tinned milk, you know"

"And what does it say?"

"That . . . that's something in American, Hafia, you won't understand that; but look at these ships," said Hordubal, quickly turning the conversation. "I sailed in one like that."

"And what's this?"

"They're chimneys, you know? These ships have a steam engine inside them, and at the back there's a kind of . . . er . . . propeller . . ."

"And what does it say?"

"You can read that some other time, you know how to read, don't you?" said Hordubal, turning away. "And this here, you see, two cars ran into each other . . ."

Polana stood on the doorstep with her hands folded on her breast, and with dry, unblinking eyes she looked round the yard. There in the room behind two heads were bent together, a man's slow voice tried to explain this and that. "That's how they do it in America, Hafia, and here, see, I once saw this myself," and then the voice halted, faltered, and murmured: "Run, Hafia, run and see what mammy's doing."

Hafia dashed towards the entrance as if released.

"Wait," said Polana, stopping her, "ask him if he wants anything to eat or drink."

"Never mind, my sweet, never mind," cried Hordubal, moving towards the entrance. "It's kind of you to think of it, thank you very much, but there's no hurry. Perhaps you have some other work to do— "

"There's always something to do," Polana suggested vaguely.

"So you see, Polana, so you see, I won't disturb you; just get on with your job, and in the meantime I. . . I'll——"

Polana raised her eyes to him, as if she wished to say something, as if she wanted suddenly to say something very much, until her lips quivered; but she suppressed it, and went out to do her work; for there's always something to do.

Hordubal stood by the door, and looked after Polana. What if I went after her into the shed—no, not yet, not yet; the shed's dark, well, somehow it's not the thing to do. Eight years, my lad, are eight years. Polana is a sensible woman, she's not going to jump round my neck like a youngster; you'd like to ask her this and that, what are the crops like, the cattle, but God be with her, she has some work to do. She always was like that. Quick at work, active, sensible.

Hordubal looked thoughtfully into the yard. A clean yard, with cinquefoil and chamomile blossoming here and there, no trickle of liquid manure running away. What about having a look round the buildings—

no, not yet, not yet; for Polana herself will say: Come and look, Juraj, see what I've done: everything is made of brick and iron, everything new, it cost so much and so much. And I shall say: Good, Polana, I am also bringing you something for the farm.

Polana works well: and she's straight, as straight as a youngster. Lord, what a straight back! She always carried her head well, even when she was a girl—Hordubal sighed, and scratched his head. Well, then, Polana, you give the lead, for eight years you've been your own mistress, it can't just end with a snap, you yourself will say that it's good to have a man in the house.

Hordubal looked thoughtfully round the yard. Everything is different, and new; Polana has done very well; but that manure, my lad, somehow I don't like that manure. It's not from the cows, it's stable manure. Two sets of harness hang on the wall, there are horse-droppings in the yard—Polana didn't say that she has horses; but listen, horses, that's not a woman's job. It takes a man to look after a stable, that's it. Hordubal wrinkled his forehead and felt worried: Yes, that's the tap of a hoof against the wooden boards; the horse scrapes with its foot,

perhaps it wants a drink, I'll fetch him some water in the canvas bucket, but no—not till Polana says: Come, Juraj, have a look round the farm. In Johnstown they had horses down below in the mine; I used to go and rub their noses—you know, Polana, there were no cows there, just catch hold of a cow by the horn, and waggle her head Na-na-na, you old beggar, heta! heta! But a horse—well, thank God you'll have a man here.

But then came a whiff of something familiar, an old smell of something from childhood. Horbudal sniffed slowly with satisfaction: wood, the resinous smell of wood, the scent of spruce logs in the sunshine. Juraj felt himself being drawn towards the heap of logs. Rough bark is good for a rough hand, there's a stump as well with a hatchet stuck in it, a wooden trestle and saw, his old saw, with its handle worn smooth with his horny hands. Juraj Horbudal sighed, glad to be home, safe and sound, he took off his coat, and wedged the log into the firm arms of the trestle.

Perspiring and happy Juraj began to saw wood for the winter.

IV

JURAJ straightened himself, and wiped the sweat away. Well, sure, this is a different job, and a different smell from that down there in the pit; Polana has a nice, sweet-smelling wood, no stumps, no dead branches. The ducks quacked, the geese made an uproar, and a wagon rattled and moved with glorious speed up the narrow road. Polana darted out from the shed, and ran, ran (Ach, Polana, you run like a girl), she opened the gate wide. Who is it, who's coming here? The whip cracked, hi, warm golden dust rose in a cloud, a team clattered into the yard, the wagon rattled, and on it was a fellow standing up bravely, Magyar fashion, holding the reins high, and cried whoa, in a high voice. He jumped from the wagon, and with the flat of his hand he patted the horse's neck.

Polana came up from the house, pale and resolute. "This is Stepan, Juraj, Stepan Manya."

The man who was bending over the traces straightened himself briskly, and turned his face towards Juraj.

You're a bit dark, thought Hordubal to himself. Lord, what a raven!

"He came here as a farm worker," Polana explained, drolly and deliberately.

The man muttered something and bent to the traces, he took out the pin, and led the horses away, holding them both by one hand, the other he gave suddenly to Hordubal. "Got here safe, mister!"

Hordubal quickly wiped his hand on his trousers, and gave it to Stepan. He felt embarrassed, and yet somehow greatly flattered. He became flustered and mumbled something, and once more he shook Stepan's hand in the American fashion. Stepan was short but wiry, he only reached up to Juraj's shoulders, but he gave him an insolent and piercing glance.

"Nice horses," murmured Hordubal, and he tried to rub their noses, but they shied and began to prance.

"Look out, mister," shouted Manya with a spiteful sparkle in his eyes. "They're Hungarian."

Ah, you darkie, you think I don't know much about horses? Well, as a matter of fact I don't, but they'll get used to their master.

The horses jerked their heads, ready to dash

away. Keep your hands in your pockets, Hordubal, and don't get out of the way in case the black one thinks you're afraid.

"This one is a three-year-old," said Manya, "from an army stallion. Whoa," he jerked the horse's mouth. "Stand still, you devil! Whoa." The horse pulled, but Stepan only laughed; and Polana came up to the horse and gave him a piece of bread. Stepan's teeth and eyes sparkled after her as he held the horse by the rein. "Hi, you! S-s-s!" It seemed as if he were forcing the horse into the earth, in the effort he hissed through his teeth; the horse stood with its neck beautifully arched, as it felt for Polana's palm with its lips. "Hi," shouted Manya, and, holding on to their heads, he took them into the stable at a trot.

Polana looked after them. "I've been bid four thousand for him, but I shan't take it," she said brightly; "Stepan says he's worth eight. We shall cover that little mare in the autumn——" Well, the deuce knows why she halted as if she had bitten her tongue. "I must get the fodder ready for her," she said, hesitating, and not knowing how to get away.

"So, so, fodder," Juraj agreed. "A nice horse, Polana; and what can he pull?"

"It's a pity to put him in a wagon," said Polana, testily. "He's not a cart-horse."

"Well, I just wondered," Hordubal managed to say. "Of course it's a pity for a nice colt like him. You've got some fine horses, it's a pleasure to look at them."

At that Manya emerged from the stable, carrying the canvas buckets for water. "You'll get eight thousand for him, mister," he asserted confidently. "And that little mare ought to be covered in the autumn. I've the offer of a little stallion for her, what a demon, eh!"

"Brutus or Hegus?" asked Polana, turning half-way

"Hegus, Brutus is too heavy," said Manya, revealing his teeth beneath his black moustache. "I don't know what's your opinion, mister, but I don't care much for heavy horses. They're strong, but they've no blood, sir, no blood."

"Well, yes," agreed Hordubal uncertainly, "it is like that with horses. And what about heifers, Stepan?"

"Heifers?" exclaimed Stepan. "Ah, you mean cows. Ah—yes, mistress has two cows, for milk

she says. You haven't been in the stall yet, sir?"

"No, I—you know I've only just come," said Hordubal, becoming embarrassed: Well, that heap of cut wood can't be denied—at the same time, he felt glad that he had begun so easily to talk to Stepan, like a master to a workman.

"Yes," he said, "I was just going there."

Stepan obsequiously led the way, carrying two buckets of water.

"We've got here—mistress has a young foal only three weeks old, and a mare in foal, she was covered two months ago. This way, sir. This gelding here is already nearly sold, two thousand five hundred sir. He's a good horse, but I have to work the three-year-old to give him some exercise. He won't stand quiet." Manya again showed his teeth. "The gelding will go to the army. All our horses have gone to the army."

"Well, well," said Juraj. "Yes, it's nice and tidy here. And have you been in the army, Stepan?"

"In the cavalry, sir." Manya showed his teeth, and gave the three-year-old a drink. "Look, mister, what a lean head, and what a back. Come up! Now

then! Look out, sir! My, what a rascal!" he said, patting the horse on the neck. "Now, sir, that's a horse for you"

Hordubal didn't feel at ease in the strong odour of the stable. A cowshed has a different smell of milk, manure, and grass, and home. "Where's the foal?" he inquired.

The foal was young and curly, and just sucking; it was all legs. The mare turned her head, and with knowing eyes looked at Hordubal: Well, who are you? Juraj melted and patted the mare on the flank; her skin was warm and as smooth as velvet.

"A good mare," said Stepan, "but heavy. Mistress wants to sell her—you know, master, a farmer won't pay a full price for a horse, and in the army they only want light horses. Heavy horses are no use. A stable all alike is better," Stepan opined. "I don't know what you think, sir——"

"Well, Polana understands," murmured Hordubal, half-heartedly. "And what about oxen, hasn't Polana got any oxen?"

"What does she want oxen for?" grinned Manya. "A mare and a gelding are enough for the land—beef doesn't pay, mister. Perhaps pig-breeding.

Have you seen what a boar mistress has got? Six
gilts, sir, and forty young ones. Weaners fetch
a good price, dealers come a long way to get them.
Sows as big as elephants, with a black snout, and
black hooves——”

Hordubal shook his head dubiously: “And what
about milk—where do you get milk for them?”

“From the farmers, if you please,” laughed Manya.
“Eh, you, you want our boar for your dirty sow?
There isn’t a boar as good as he is in the whole
country. How many buckets of milk, and how many
sacks of potatoes will you give for him? Well, sir,
you sweat for nothing here. Too far from the town,
it’s difficult to sell anything. The people are stupid, sir.
They grow things only for their guts. Let them give
stuff away if they don’t know how to sell.”

Hordubal nodded vaguely. That’s true, we used
to sell very little, only a few hens and geese. Well,
this is something different. Polana knows how to
manage things, that’s true.

“Sell a long way away,” said Stepan thoughtfully,
“and only then, if it’s worth while. Who’d go to
the market with one pat of butter? They can see
from your face that you’ve got nothing; well,

then, either put the price down, or go to the devil!"

"And where are you from?" asked Juraj.

"From down there, from Rybary, do you know the place, sir?"

Hordubal didn't, but he nodded: so, from Rybary; what master wouldn't know?

"That's a different country, sir, rich and as flat as you like. Take the swamp at Rybary—why, all the country here would go into it like a pea in a pocket; and grass, sir, grass, up to your waist." Manya waved his hand. "Ah, it's a lousy country here, you begin to plough, and you only turn up stones. With us if you dig a well, there's black soil right down to the bottom."

Hordubal's face clouded. What do you know, you Tartar—I, I've ploughed here and turned up stones; but Lord, the woods, and meadows! In a bad humour Juraj went out of the stable. A lousy country, you say, well what made you push your nose in here, you devil? Isn't it good enough for the cattle? But, glory to God, this is the time for the cattle, already they tinkle in the valley and ring round the village, bells, with a cracked sound, deep

and slow, slow like the step of a cow; only the little high-pitched bells of the calves dash about. Well, well, even you will grow up, and go heavily and seriously like cows, as we do. The sound of the herds drew nearer, and Juraj felt like taking off his hat as if it were the angelus. Our Father, which are in Heaven; like a river the sound came nearer—it broke up into heavy drops, it spread over the whole village; one cow after the other left the herd, and bim bam, bim bam, made for her shed, the scent of dust and milk, bim bam in the gate, and, nodding their heads, two cows ambled into Hordubal's yard, wise and gentle creatures, and made for the cowshed door. Hordubal heaved a deep sigh. Well, I've also come home, thanks to the Lord, this is the homecoming. The sound of the herds dispersed over the village, and died down, a bat began its zig-zag flight after flies in the wake of the herd. Good evening, master! From the stable, with a long moo, the cow made herself heard. Well, well, I'm coming. In the dark Juraj entered the shed, felt the horns, the hard and hairy forehead, the damp muzzle, the softly folded skin on the neck; he felt for the tin pail, and the stool, and sat down to the full udder; he milked one teat

after the other, the milk rang as it struck the empty pail, and thinly, under his breath, Juraj began to sing

A figure with a dark silhouette stood in the doorway. Hordubal stopped singing. "It's me, Polana," he murmured apologetically. "So that the cows get used to me."

"Won't you come to supper?" Polana inquired.

"Not till I've finished milking," replied Hordubal from the darkness. "Stepan can have his with us."

JURAJ HORDUBAL sat down at the head of the table, folded his hands, and said grace. That's as it should be now that you are master. Polana sat with closed lips, her hands clasped together, Hafia stared and didn't know what to do, Stepan frowned stubbornly at the floor—What, you, you don't say grace, Polana? Well, Stepan may be of another creed, but grace is the proper thing at table. Look at them, they grow peevish, they eat fast, and silently. Hafia toys with the food on her plate—"Eat, Hafia," said Polana, admonishing her drily, but she herself hardly put anything into her mouth; only Stepan, leaning over his plate, made a loud noise as he took food from his spoon.

After the meal Manya wondered what to do with himself. "Wait a bit, Stepan," Hordubal urged him. "What did I want to say—Yes, and what was the harvest like this year?"

"The hay was good," said Manya evasively.

"And rye?"

Polana looked sharply at Stepan. "Rye," Manya

said slowly: "Why, as a matter of fact, mistress sold those top fields. It wasn't worth the trouble, sir. All stones."

Inside Hordubal something snapped. "All stones," he mumbled, "yes, all stones; but, Polana, a field is the foundation——"

Stepan showed his teeth with self-assurance. "It wasn't worth the trouble, mister. The fields near the river are better. We've had maize as tall as a man."

"Near the river," said Hordubal taken aback. "So you've bought, Polana, some land in the plain?"

Polana was about to say something, but she swallowed it. "Manor fields, mister," explained Manya. "The soil's like a threshing floor, deep, good for sugar beet. But sugar beet's a poor business. It's a bad time, sir, better put your money in horses: a horse turns out well, and you get more for a horse than for a year of forced labour. If we only had another piece of land in the plain, and built stables down there——" Stepan's eyes sparkled. "Horses aren't goats, sir, they want flat land."

"The owner is willing to sell those fields," Polana remarked, almost to herself, and began to figure out what they would cost; but Hordubal wasn't listening;

he was thinking of the rye and potato fields that Polana had sold. They were all stone certainly, but hadn't they been stone for ever? That, my lad, was part of the job. Two years before I went away I turned a piece of waste land into a field—eh, what do you know of hard work in the fields!

Hafia came stealthily to Stepan and leaned with her elbow against his shoulder. "Uncle Stepan," she whispered.

"What is it?" smiled Manya.

The little one wriggled shyly. "I only——"

Stepan held her between his knees, and rocked her: "Well, Hafia, what did you want to say?"

Stepan whispered into his ear: "Uncle Stepan, I've seen such a beautiful little puppy to-day!"

"Have you really?" inquired Manya importantly. "And I've seen a hare with three little ones."

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Hafia in amazement, "and where?"

"In the clover."

"And shall you shoot them in the autumn?"

Stepan looked sideways at Hordubal. "Well, I don't know."

A good fellow, thought Juraj to himself with

relief, the child loves him, she wouldn't come to me. Children get used to things; but that she didn't mention those pictures I brought her from America! I ought to give something to Stepan—an idea struck him, and he looked round for his wooden box.

"I've put your things out on the dresser," said Polana. She always was so careful, mused Juraj gravely, going up to the pile of things from America. "This is for you, Hafia, these pictures, and this teddy-bear here—"

"What is it, uncle?" murmured Hafia.

"It's a bear," Manya explained. "Have you ever seen a live bear? They live away there in the mountains."

"And have you seen them?" urged Hafia.

"Yes, I have. They growl."

"This, Polana, is for you," mumbled Hordubal shyly. "They're silly things, well, but I didn't know what" Juraj turned away, rummaging in his possessions for something he could give to Manya. "And this, Stepan," he said shyly, "perhaps might suit you: an American knife, and an American pipe—"

"Ach you," Polana burst out, almost choking,

her eyes filling with tears as she rushed out of the room. Well, Polana, what is it?

"Thank you very much, mister." Manya bowed, showing all his teeth, and gave his hand to Juraj. Eh, you; what strong hands you've got! It would be worth while to take you on. Well, praise be to God, sighed Hordubal with relief, that's over.

"Show me the knife, uncle," begged Hafia.

"Look," said Stepan boasting, "this knife has come all the way from America. I will carve an American doll for you with it. Would you like it?"

"Yes, uncle," cried Hafia, "but you will, won't you?"

Juraj smiled broadly and happily.

But it wasn't all over yet. Juraj knew what was expected of him. When a man returns from America he must show himself in the pub, meet the neighbours, and stand them drinks. Let them all see that he's not come back empty handed, and in disgrace. Hi, landlord! drinks all round, and look sharp; what, you've forgotten Hordubal, and aren't I the miner from America? Let them know all over the village that Hordubal's come back. Eh, let's go and have a look at Hordubal, hi, missus, my coat, and my hat——

"I shall be back soon, Polana, go to bed, and don't sit up for me," urged Juraj, and he tramped ostentatiously through the dark village towards the public house. What different smells a village has. wood, cows, straw, hay, here's the smell of geese, and there it stinks of mayweed and nettles. In the pub old Salo Berkovic was no longer there, a red-haired Jew got up from the table, and inquired suspiciously: "And what would you like, sir?"

Someone was sitting in the corner. Who could it

be? It might be Pjosa, yes, it was—Andrej Pjosa, called Husar, stared at Juraj as if he wanted to shout: Is that you, Juraj? Oh, yes, it's me, Andrej Husar, you see it's me.—Well, Pjosa didn't shout, he sat and gazed; and Hordubal, to show that he belonged to the place, said: "Is old Berkovic still alive?"

The freckled Jew placed a glass of brandy on the table. "It's six years ago since he was buried." Six years? eh, Pjosa, that's a long time; what's left of a man after six years—and what after eight? Eight years, I haven't drunk brandy for eight years: my God, I should have liked to drink it sometimes—to drown my sorrow, to spit at the strangeness, you know; but they wouldn't let them make brandy in America. At any rate, I sent more dollars to Polana; and, see, she bought horses and sold some land. All stones, they say. And you, Husar, you haven't sold any land? Well, it's clear that you haven't been in America.

The Jew stood at the bar, and stared at Juraj. Shall I begin a conversation with him? the Jew wondered. He's not talkative it seems, he looks so, so, better not interfere; what fellow from the

district can it be? Matey Pagurko has got a son somewhere, maybe it's Matey's son; or it might be Hordubal, Polana Hordubal's husband, who was in America—

Juraj blinked his eyes. The Jew turned away and busied himself arranging the glasses on the counter; and what about you, Pjosa, why do you keep your eyes down? Am I to speak to you by name? That's it, Andrej Pjosa— you get out of the habit of talking, your mouth turns wooden, but—well, even a horse, even a cow wants to hear a human voice. It's true Polana was always quiet, and eight years don't make you talk, loneliness doesn't teach you to talk; I don't know where to begin myself: she doesn't ask—I don't speak, she doesn't talk—I don't want to ask. Eh, what, Stepan is a good workman, he even does the talking for her. She sold the fields and bought a pusta in the plain, and there you are.

Hordubal sipped his brandy and nodded his head. This stuff burns, but you get used to it. Stepan— seems to be a good chap, apparently; he understands horses, and he likes Hafiz; and as for Polana— a woman gets used to things, and what is to come will come by itself. Eh, Pjosa, and what about your

wife—is she strange sometimes? Well, you beat her, but Polana is—like a lady, Andrej. That's it. She's sensible, hard-working, and clean—praise be to God. She is strange, certainly; and she carries herself like no other woman in the village. I don't know how to manage her, Husar. I ought to have rushed into the house like the wind, and danced her round until she was out of breath. That's how it's done, Andrej. But I—you see, I couldn't do that. She was scared, as if I were a ghost. Even Hafia is frightened somehow. And you, Pjosa. Well, here I am, what am I to do? If the twig doesn't break it will bend. Good health, Andrej! Andrej Pjosa called Husar got up, and went towards the door as if he hadn't noticed anything. At the door he turned, glanced back, and burst out: "Back safe, Juraj!" You are a queer bird, Husar; as if you couldn't sit down with me—don't think that I've come back like a beggar: I've a nice couple of hundred dollars, even Polana doesn't know of it yet. Well, you see, Pjosa did recognize me; well, look here, that came by itself, the other will come by itself, too. Hordubal felt happier. "Hi, landlord, bring me another one!"

The door flew open, and a fellow elbowed his

way through it, he filled the room at once.—Why, it's Vasil Genic Vasilov, my best pal; with only a glance he was already at the table, Vasil! Juraj! The embrace of a fellow like that is rough, and smells of tobacco, but it's good, eh, you Vasil! "Welcome, Juraj!" he cried, looking worried, "and what brings you here?" "And why not, you camel, did you want me to die there?" laughed Hordubal. "Well," said Genic evasively, "it's not a good time for farmers now. You're all right, aren't you? Praise to God at least for that." You are queer, Vasil, you only sit on the edge of the chair, and you empty your glass at one gulp "What's the news?" "Well, the old Kekercuk's dead, a week after Christmas, may he rest in peace; and on Sunday young Horolenko married Michalcuk's girl, last year the devil brought us foot-and-mouth disease—Ach, Juraj, they've made me mayor here, I'm an official, you know; it's only a nuisance—." The conversation fell to pieces, Vasil Vasilov somehow didn't know what to say, he rose and gave his hand to Juraj: "Good luck, Juraj; I must go."

Juraj smiled, and turned his glass round with heavy fingers Vasil is no more what he used to be, ah, God in Heaven, how he knew how to drink

until the windows rattled; but he came to me, and embraced—pal. Good luck, Juraj; why did you behave like that, is it written on my face that my homecoming wasn't a success? Ah, it was'nt, but that will come yet; slowly, slowly, I shall come back; every day, bit by bit, and look, soon I shall be at home. I've got money, Vasil; I could even buy land if I wanted, or cows, twelve cows if I like; I shall take them out to graze on the meadows myself, perhaps as far as Volov Chrbat; in the evening I shall return, with twelve bells ringing, and Polana will run swiftly to open the gate, like a young girl—

Silence reigned in the public house, the Jew drowsed behind the bar; yes, loneliness is good for a man; his head keeps on turning, turning, but in that way, my friend, he gets his ideas straightened out. To return step by step, and slowly like the cows; but what if I dash in like a team, charge into the yard, and make the sparks fly—stand up, hold the reins high, and jump down—here I am, Polana, and now I shall not let you go; I shall carry you in my arms into the house, and I shall hold you to me and squeeze the breath out of you. You are soft, Polana. Eight years, for eight years I've been thinking of you; and

only now shall I go to you. Hordubal bit his teeth together until the muscles bulged out in his cheeks. Hi, wild horses, hi! Let Polana see—her knees will tremble with fright and pleasure, let her see: her man is coming back.

IN the moonlight Hordubal returned, drunk because he was unused to brandy, and unused to such thoughts, for he was going to a woman. Why do you make me feel so cold, moon—aren't I going so silently and lightly that I don't even shake the dew from off the grass? Hi, you dogs, all over the village, it's Juraj Hordubal going home, after eight years the chap's come back, feeling his arms curve to hold a woman. Yes, now I have you in my arms, and even that's not enough, I should like to press you to my mouth, and feel you with my fingers, Polana, Polana! And why do you make me feel so cold, you? Yes, I am drunk, because I need courage, because I want to dash headlong home; close my eyes, wave my arms, and jump head first—— Here you have me, Polana, here, and here, and here, everywhere, where are your hands, your legs, your mouth; eh, how big you are, how much there is of you, from head to toe, when shall I hold you all.

Hordubal went on through the moonlight night, quivering in every part of his body. You wouldn't

shout, you wouldn't say a word in the moonlight night, you wouldn't break into its smooth surface: silence, silence, that light shadow is you, don't call to me by name, it's me; I hold you as silently as a tree grows, and I shan't break into this smooth surface, I shan't say a word, I shan't breathe, ah, Polana, you could hear a star fall.

But no, the moon doesn't shine on us, to us it doesn't seem so chill, it shines over the dark wood, and with us it's dark, a darkness that seems alive, you must feel with your hands in the dark, and you find your wife, she sleeps—no, she's not asleep, you can't see her, but there she is, she laughs quietly at you, and makes room for you, what a space for such long limbs, there's no room for you, you must squeeze yourself into her arms; and she whispers into your ear, you don't know what it is—the words are cold, but the whisper is warm, and dark, in a moment the darkness has become thicker, so dense and heavy, that you can feel it, and it is the woman, her hair, her shoulders; and she breathes, she draws in her breath between her teeth, she breathes darkly into your face—eh, Polana, Hordubal burst out, ah, you!

Silently Juraj unlatched the little gate leading

into the yard, and trembled. Polana was sitting on the doorstep in the moonlight, waiting. "You, Polana," he murmured, and his spirit fell. "Why aren't you asleep?"

Polana shivered with cold. "I'm waiting for you. I wanted to ask you. Last year we sold a pair of horses for seven thousand; so what you—what do you think?"

"Y-Yes," said Hordubal, hesitating. "That's good, well, we'll talk about it to-morrow——"

"I want to do it now," said Polana harshly. "That's why I've waited for you. I don't want to look after cows any longer . . . drudge in the fields . . . well, I don't want to!"

"You won't," said Hordubal, glancing at her hands, shining white in the moonlight, "now I'm here to do the work."

"And what about Stepan?"

Juraj was silent, he sighed. Why talk about it now? "Well," he murmured, "there'll not be work enough for two."

"And what about the horses?" interposed Polana quickly. "Somebody must look after the horses, and you don't understand them——"

"That's true," he said evasively, "but we'll manage somehow."

"I want to know!" urged Polana, clenching her fists. Eh, how quick you are! "Just as you like, Polana, just as you like," Jura, heard himself say. "Stepan can stay, my sweet; . . . I must tell you, I've brought some money with me. . . . I will do everything for you."

"Stepan understands horses, you won't find another like him. He's worked for me for five years" Polana rose, strange and pale in the moonlight. "Good night; don't make a noise; Hafia is asleep"

"What—what you—where are you going?" exclaimed Hordubal, taken aback.

"Up in the loft. You sleep in the room, you are master here." In Polana's face there was something hard, something evil. "Stepan sleeps in the stable."

Hordubal sat motionless on the doorstep, and looked at the moonlight night. So, so I don't want to think, my head has become wooden: and what is it that sticks in my throat so that I can't swallow it? You sleep in the room, you are master here. That's it.

Somewhere in the distance a dog barked, a cow

rattled her chain in the stall. You sleep in the room. Eh, stupid head! You turn it, and nothing, nothing—it only throbs. Master, she said. All this is yours, master, these white walls, yard, everything. What a master you are. You have the whole room for yourself. You alone will roll on the bed—well, master! And what if I can't get up. My head is so heavy—perhaps it's the brandy, the wood spirit the red-haired Jew gave me, but didn't I come from the pub as if I were dancing? Yes, that's it, in the room. Polana wants to honour her master, he shall sleep like a guest. A great weariness came over Hordubal. Well, yes, she wants me to rest, to be comfortable after the journey; yes, I can't even get up, it's silly to have legs like jelly. And the moon has already hidden herself behind the roof.

“Eleven o'clock has struck, every creature praise the L-O-R-D.” That's the night watchman calling—they don't call like that in America—it's strange in America. He mustn't see me here, that would be a shame. Hordubal grew frightened, and silently, like a thief, he stole into the room. He took off his coat, and heard a faint breathing. God be praised, Polana was only joking, she's asleep here. Ah, what

a stupid! And I like a log in the yard! Juraj stole silently, silently, up to the bed and groped with his hands: here some hair, there a small, thin arm—Hafia. The child whimpered, and buried her face in the pillow. Yes, it's Hafia. Juraj sat down silently on the side of the bed. I'll cover her tiny legs. Oh, God, how can I get into bed? I shall only wake the child. Perhaps Polana wanted her to get accustomed to her father. That's it, father and child in the room, and she in the loft.

An idea struck Juraj—and, well, it wouldn't let him rest. She said: I'm going to sleep in the loft. Perhaps she said it on purpose: you silly, you can come after me, you know where I am. I'm going to sleep in the loft. There's no Hafia in the loft. Hordubal stood up in the darkness, like a pillar, and his heart beat fast. Polana is proud, she wouldn't, say: here you have me, you must go after her as if she were a girl, you must feel about in the darkness, and she will laugh quietly: ah, Juraj, you silly, for eight years I've been thinking of you.

Silently, silently, Juraj crawled up into the loft. Ah, how dark it is, Polana, where are you, I can hear your heart beating "Polana, Polana," whispered

Hordubal, groping in the darkness. "Go, go away," came a dithering groan from the darkness. "I don't want you! Please, please, please." "I . . . nothing, Polana," murmured Hordubal, deeply confused, "I only . . . to ask you if you are comfortable here——" "Please, go away, go," came a terrified groan from the darkness.

"I only wanted to tell you," stammered Hordubal . . . "My dear, everything shall be just as you want . . . you can even buy land in the plain . . ."

"Go, go away," cried Polana, at her wits' end—and Juraj never knew how he got down, somehow, as if he were falling headlong into an abyss. But no, he didn't fall, he sat on the bottom step, and felt as if he were falling into an abyss. So far, Jesus Christ, to fall so far! And who's wheezing here? It's me, it's me. I'm not grunting, I'm only trying to get my breath, and it's not my fault if I groan, again and again! Well, grunt; you are at home now, you are master here.

Hordubal halted, he sat on the step, and peered into the darkness. You sleep in the room, she said, you are master here. So that's what's wrong with you, Polana: You've been your own mistress for

eight years, and now you're angry because you'll have a master over you. Eh, my sweet! look what a master! He sits on the step, and whimpers. You'd like to wipe his nose with your apron. Hordubal felt his face move, he touched it. My God, it's a smile! Hordubal smiled into the darkness: What a master, farm worker! Mistress, a farm worker has come to look after your cows, and you, Polana, shall be like a lady. Well, you see, everything can be set right, horses and cows, Stepan and Juraj. I shall breed cattle for you, Polana, a pleasure to look at—and sheep, you shall have everything, you shall be mistress over everything.

So now, it was already easier to breathe, and he didn't groan any more, he began to breathe deeply, like a pair of bellows. What do you think, ma'm, a farm worker doesn't sleep in the room, he should go and sleep with the cows, that's his place. At any rate, it's not so lonely, you can hear something breathing; perhaps he says something aloud, and then gets frightened, but you can talk to a cow—she turns her head, and listens. You sleep well in a cowshed

Silently, quietly, Juraj stole into the cowshed,

the warm smell of cattle greeted his nostrils, a chain jingled against the stanchion. Heta, you cows, heta, it's me; thank God, there's straw enough for a man.

"Midnight has struck, every creature praise the L-O-R-D, and Jesus Christ His Son." No, it's not like this in America. "Take care that light and fire do no harm to anyone——"

Tu-tu-tu went the night watchman's horn, as if a cow had lowed.

VIII

STEPAN was hitching the horses to the wagon. "Good morning, master," he called, "don't you want to have a look round the meadows?"

Juraj frowned slightly: Am I a bailiff to drive about in a carriage and look round the fields? Eh, well, there's nothing to do, there's nowhere to take a scythe to the corn, why shouldn't I have a look at Polana's farming?

Stepan wore wide linen trousers and a blue apron—it was clear that he was from the plain, and he was as dark as a gipsy. "C-c," he clicked to the horses, and with a rattle and clatter off they flew. Juraj had to hold fast to the wagon, but Stepan stood erect, his tiny hat perched at the back of his head, the reins held high, and he played with the whip over the horses' backs. Well, well, slowly, there's no hurry.

"But, my lad," said Juraj, somewhat discontented, "why are you pulling at the horses' mouths? You see how they chafe, it hurts them."

Stepan turned and showed his teeth. "It has to be

like that," he said, "so that they carry their heads high."

"And what for?" objected Hordubal. "Let them carry their heads as they grew."

"It pays very well, mister," Stepan explained. "Every buyer looks whether a horse carries his head high. Look, look now they're going very well: on their hind legs, with their front ones they only just scratch the ground. C-c."

"And don't make them go so fast," cried Hordubal.

"They learn to trot," said Manya, indifferently. "Let them learn. What can you do with a slow horse?"

Does Stepan drive Polana about like this? wondered Hordubal. The whole village turns to look: That's Hordubal's wife on the wagon, fine, like a lady: she folds her arms, and sits erect. And why shouldn't she feel proud? thought Juraj. Praise be to God, she's different from the other women, firm and erect, like a pillar; she's made the farm like a castle; she got seven thousand for a pair of horses, well, then, she can carry her head high. It pays very well, my lad.

"Now there's that flat land," said Stepan, pointing

with his whip. "Right up to those acacias it belongs to the mistress."

Hordubal climbed down from the wagon as if broken. You've shaken me about, you devil. So this is that flat land; grass up to the waist, but dry and hard—don't tell me, this isn't soil for sugar beet, it's a steppe.

Manya scratched his head. "If you bought this land as far as there, mister, you could keep thirty horses here."

"We-il," objected Hordubal, "it's not very rich, my good fellow."

"What do you want with rich land?" grinned Manya. "A horse must be dry, mister. Or do you want to feed horses for the butcher?"

Hordubal made no reply, and, going up to the horses, he rubbed their noses "Well-well-well, little chap, don't get frightened, you're a nice one. What are you pricking your ears for? And you, ah, you're a knowing one! Why are you pawing the ground? What do you want?" Stepan unharnessed the horses, he straightened himself, and said, somewhat sharply: "Don't talk to the horses, mister. It makes them soft."

Hordubal looked up with a start: so that's how you talk to your master! And, well, perhaps so that the horses don't get used to me. I won't meddle with your horses, you camel; well, well, you needn't frown.

Stepan let the horses loose to graze, and took up the scythe, ready to cut some grass. What a block-head not to have taken another scythe with him! Juraj sighed, and looked out over the plain to the hills behind Kriva. There at any rate were real fields—all stone, perhaps, but they were fields: potatoes, oats, rye—somewhere there rye was still growing, somewhere there they were already cutting the corn. “And who bought those fields of ours up there, Stepan?”

“Someone called Pjosa,” said Manya.

Ah, Pjosa, Andrej Pjosa Husar; that's the reason why he didn't speak to me in the pub; he was ashamed because he had deprived a woman of her field. Juraj looked up over the hills. Strange, as if Hordubal's fields had run down the hills, and settled in the plain.

“And Rybary is down there?” inquired Juraj.

“Down there,” said Stepan. “Over there, about three hours away.”

Three hours away, see, it's a long way yet to Rybary. Out of boredom Hordubal picked a halm of grass and began to chew it; it was rather harsh and sour. The grass up there, on the slopes, tastes quite different, spicy, of thyme. Juraj walked slowly over the meadow, further and further. What a flat land, nothing to see but the sky, and even the sky isn't the same as up there; it looks dusty. And here's a field of maize as tall as a man, all green stuff; ach, Lord, it looks so unidy—just let the sows in, there would be a grunting! While a field of rye is like a velvet coat. Acacias—Juraj didn't like the acacias; up there there are blackthorns, spindle-trees, and mountain-ash, and none of those good-for-nothing acacias. I can't even see Manya now, in that apron of his, and high boots. And what about not talking to the horses! A horse is a wise animal, like a cow; it learns quietness through talking.

A flat plain spread out before Juraj, he was overcome with loneliness, it was almost like the sea; what could he do there! He turned towards the hills; ah, you, even you are eaten away by the flat land, it makes you look small and stupid. But to tramp up them, my friend, then at least you learn what the

earth is like. And Juraj could not stand it any longer, he hastened back to the village, leaving Stepan behind with his team. I'll look at the crops, he thought to himself, but he kept going for an hour, and still the hills were far away in front, and it was so hot, not a breath of air was stirring. So here's your flat land. Who would have thought that Stepan had taken me so far? Only c-c, and we were already at the other end of the earth. Polana has keen horses: what's the good of a slow horse, mister?

Hordubal had already been going for two hours, and there at last was the beginning of the village; gipsies, the scoundrels, rolling about among hemlocks and thorn-apples, and there already was the smithy. Hordubal halted, something came into his head, ah, Polana, I'll show you! He barged his way into the blacksmith's shop. Hello, my man, make me a latch, well, what kind of a latch, for a door. I'll wait till you've made it. The smith didn't recognize Hordubal, it was dark inside the shop, and he could not see for the blaze. Well, if you want a latch, I'll make it for you; and he began hammering hard on a big one. Well, my man, what are Polana's horses like? Why, like demons, but for the gentry; no good

for work, uncle. When you shoe them, aha! it needs two fellows to hold devils like them.

Hordubal looked at the glowing piece of iron I shall bring you something, Polana, something for the house. And what's a horse like that worth? The smith spat. God's my witness, they say they want eight thousand for it. All that money for a horse! If the wild terror falls lame what have you got? A little Hutsul horse is better, or a heavy gelding, with a back like an altar, and a breast like an organ—ei, they were horses, they used to have on the estate! But now—a tractor! The squire is selling his meadows: what's the use of hay, he says, what good are horses, now they've got machines——?

Hordubal nodded. Yes, machines like they have in America I must see that Polana doesn't go wrong. Machines will come, and what shall you do with horses then! Aha, so you see; no, no, Polana, I shan't let you have my dollars to buy meadows. Fields and cows; they're something different—a man can't fill his belly with machines. And it doesn't pay, they say. Well, perhaps not, but you've got milk and corn anyhow.

Hordubal went back home, carrying the piece of

iron still warm. Polana—perhaps she's cooking the dinner. Juraj stole up the steps to the loft, and fixed the latch on the inner side of the little door. So, and now the staple—Polana climbed up the steps, and knitted her brows, to see what Juraj was tinkering at up there. What, will she ask? No, she won't, she only looks on with a fixed gaze. "It's already finished," murmured Hordubal. "I've only fixed up a latch for you, so that you can lock yourself in."

IX

AND already it's so dull for you, Jura, Juraj; you walk round the farmyard, gaze about, and you don't know what to do. Grow savoys? That's no job for a man. Feed the hens? Feed the pigs? Oh, that's an old woman's job. The wood's already sawn, and chopped up, you've mended the fence, you've patched up this and that; you slouch like old Kyryl, who mumbles to himself over there in Michal Herpak's farmyard. And the neighbours' women peep. That's a fine farmer, hands in his pockets, and yawning. May your jaw fall off!

Down there in the meadows—is Manya: what am I to do there? Don't talk to the horses, and so—stay there alone, what's there for me in the plain? Look at him, a farm worker from somewhere, and says, if you do this and that, mister. And look, I shall, it's not for you to order me about, but if it's of wood I shall make it. In the old days forests were cut; and they don't sell the wood any more, they say, it rots on the ground, the saw-mills stand—

God, to mind the cows once again! Not two

young heifers, people would laugh, but twelve cows; and drive them perhaps as far as Volov Chrbat, with a heavy stick in my hand ready for a bear. And nobody would say: don't talk to the cows. You have to shout at cattle.

But Polana wouldn't even listen—the butcher gives you eight hundred for a cow, she says, and yet he lets you have it as a favour. Well, never mind the butcher—for myself I'd rear cattle: but if you don't want, all right. I shan't stick the money in the plain for you.

Or harness cows to the wagon and go to the fields to bring the harvest home. The man walks, walks, with one hand on the yoke, get on! O—ou! No hurry, only as much as the cows can manage. Even in America I didn't get used to any other pace; only the cows' pace. And going down with a load of sheaves, to catch the wheel by the spokes, and hold all the loaded wagon in your hand—God be praised, at any rate you realize that you've got hands. That's a man's job, Polana. Ah, God have mercy, what vanity—but one's hands get soft; and what able hands they are, hard, American ones.

Yes, Polana, you can run about, you've always got something to do, here the hens, there the pigs,

there something in the dairy, but it's a shame for a fellow to lean on the fence. If only you said, You, Juraj, you could do this and that; but you're like an arrow, no one can talk with you. I could tell you things—perhaps this: in America, Polana, a fellow can sweep, wash the dishes, and wipe the floor, and he's not ashamed; they have a good time, those women in America. But you—you scowl as soon as I touch anything. it's not right, you say, people will laugh at you. Ah, what's it matter! let them laugh, the silly fools. I do something in the stable, I give the horses food or drink—and again Stepan scowls. Don't talk to the horses, he says, and so on Right-ho, you! And he's always scowling. Well, well, don't eat me with your eyes. He doesn't even talk to the mistress, he hardly opens his mug, and only with those eyes of his. He's bitter, he's all yellow with bitterness, it gnaws his entrails. And Polana is frightened of him, too, she says: Go, Hafia, and tell Stepan to do so and so, ask him about this and that—Hafia isn't frightened of him. She calls him uncle, and he takes her on his knee: This is how the colt jumps, Hafia, this is how the mare goes—and he sings, but as soon as he sees anyone

there *something in* the dairy, but it's a shame for a fellow to lean on the fence. If only you said, You, Juraj, you could do this and that; but you're like an arrow, no one can talk with you. I could tell you things—perhaps this: in America, Polana, a fellow can sweep, wash the dishes, and wipe the floor, and he's not ashamed, they have a good time, those women in America. But you—you scowl as soon as I touch anything: it's not right, you say, people will laugh at you. Ah, what's it matter! let them laugh, the silly fools. I do something in the stable, I give the horses food or drink—and again Stepan scowls. Don't talk to the horses, he says, and so on. Right-ho, you! And he's always scowling. Well, well, don't eat me with your eyes. He doesn't even talk to the mistress, he hardly opens his mug, and only with those eyes of his. He's bitter, he's all yellow with bitterness, it gnaws his entrails. And Polana is frightened of him, too, she says Go, Hafia, and tell Stepan to do so and so, ask him about this and that—Hafia isn't frightened of him. She calls him uncle, and he takes her on his knee. This is how the colt jumps, Hafia, this is how the mare goes—and he sings, but as soon as he sees anyone

it's as if someone cut him short, and he moves away into the stable.

Hordubal scratched his head, and the barn knows why Hafia is so frightened of me. She plays and plays, but as soon as I come she stops, and she doesn't take her eyes from me, only off and away. Well, well. Eh, Hafia, I should like to make wooden toys for you, if only you would lean against my shoulder and look—ooh, what's it going to be? And what couldn't I tell you about America, child! there are negroes there, and such ~~machines~~—oh, God be with you, Hafia, run along to your Stepan. Don't bear her, Polana, you can't tame anyone with force; but if you sat down sometimes, if we only talked to one another, Hafia would come, and she would listen, she would put her elbow against my knee—I could tell her many odd things, the child would listen with her mouth wide open. Well, in winter perhaps, in winter, by the fire—

Below from the village came the noise of geese, and the rattling of a cart—that's Manya coming back. Juraj waved his hand, and retired behind the barn. What, am I to stand here, just staring at you! You bring a load of hay, and you make as much

there something in the dairy, but it's a shame for a fellow to lean on the fence. If only you said, You, Juraj, you could do this and that; but you're like an arrow, no one can talk with you. I could tell you things—perhaps this: in America, Polana, a fellow can sweep, wash the dishes, and wipe the floor, and he's not ashamed; they have a good time, those women in America. But you—you scowl as soon as I touch anything: it's not right, you say, people will laugh at you. Ah, what's it matter! let them laugh, the silly fools. I do something in the stable, I give the horses food or drink—and again Stepan scowls. Don't talk to the horses, he says, and so on. Right-ho, you! And he's always scowling. Well, well, don't eat me with your eyes. He doesn't even talk to the mistress, he hardly opens his mug, and only with those eyes of his. He's bitter, he's all yellow with bitterness, it gnaws his entrails. And Polana is frightened of him, too, she says: Go, Hafia, and tell Stepan to do so and so, ask him about this and that—Hafia isn't frightened of him. She calls him uncle, and he takes her on his knee: This is how the colt jumps, Hafia, this is how the mare goes—and he sings, but as soon as he sees anyone

it's as if someone cut him short, and he crawls away into the stable.

Hordubal scratched his head. And the deuce knows why Hafia is so frightened of me. She plays and plays, but as soon as I come she stops, and she doesn't take her eyes from me, only off and away. Well, run. Eh, Hafia, I should like to make wooden toys for you, if only you would lean against my shoulder and look—ooh, what's it going to be? And what couldn't I tell you about America, child! there are negroes there, and such machines—eh, God be with you, Hafia, run along to your Stepan. Don't beat her, Polana, you can't tame anyone with force; but if you sat down sometimes, if we only talked to one another, Hafia would come, and she would listen, she would put her elbow against my knee—I could tell her many odd things, the child would listen with her mouth wide open. Well, in winter perhaps, in winter, by the fire—

Below from the village came the noise of geese, and the rattling of a cart—that's Manya coming back. Juraj waved his hand, and retired behind the barn. What, am I to stand here, just staring at you! You bring a load of hay, and you make as much

noise as if you'd brought God knows what. And here is silence, here you are at the back of the world. They let the orchard go to ruin, we used to have pears and plums here, and now nothing. Those old trees ought to be cleared away, and young ones planted in the autumn, but no; there's nothing old left, nothing that was here before, except those barren trees: stay here with God. There used to be a shady little orchard, but now pigs root there; and nettles; oh, God!

Don't you realize, I saw many things in America; I had a look, and see, this or that could be done here, too. They have nice things there, handy ones—just take their different machines! Or this—grow vegetables. Or rabbits. But it's best with rabbits when you've plenty of leaves from the vegetables. And then, many things might be done. I would do everything, if only, Polana, if only you took a glance to see what Juraj is doing. And what is it going to be, Juraj? Cages for the rabbits, Hafia will be pleased, you'll even be able to make her a little fur coat. Or a pigeon-house, for instance. And then, wouldn't you like some bees? I could make a bee-hive, not out of a log, but a bee-hive with a little

piece of glass at the back, so that you can see inside. In Johnstown there was a miner, a Pole, a great bee-keeper; just think, he even had a wire mask for his face. You learn a lot. If only you wanted, Polana, if only you looked—there would be lots of things. Or ask: how do they do so and so in America? Well, you never ask, it's difficult to tell you anything. A man is too shy to do something only for his own interest, for himself—as if he were only playing: but for someone else—he spits in his hands, and even whistles. It's like that, Polana.

Glory to God, I can hear the cow-bells ringing, it's evening already; they must be tied up, given water, patted, Hafia will shout: Stepan, daddy, supper; Stepan eats noisily, Polana is silent. Hafia whispers to uncle Stepan, well, what is there to do; good night everybody. Hafia in the room, Polana in the loft, Stepan in the stable—walk round the yard once more, and crawl into the cowshed to sleep. And there, with my hands under my head, I can even explain aloud what we could have, and how things might be done.

And the cows—as if they understand; they turn their heads and look.

X

"TELL them, Hafia, that I'm not coming back till the evening."

A slice of bread and bacon, all is ready, and now for the hills. Hordubal felt free and almost homesick, like a child that has escaped from its mammy. And he looked over the village as if something had changed there. What was it? This used to be Hordubal's field? It was, without a doubt—all stones, they said, and yet Pjosa had a crop of barley here, he's got potatoes here, and a little patch of flax, see how Pjosa's field and Hordubal's have been joined together. But there, higher up, by the mountain-ash—from there you can see the whole village. There you can marvel at God's wisdom: Kriva, the village is called, and really it is crooked, bent into an arch, like a cow lying down. One roof next to the other, all the same, like a flock of sheep: but that white building is Polana's. As if it didn't fit in here, thought Juraj; the roof is red, new—one might ask who has come here? Someone from the plain, where people have no wood, and must use brick—

The plain. From here even the plain is visible. Blue, level—like the sea, well, a weary waste. That's why they go so fast: the road is dismal, a man walks—walks, and it's as if he trod on one spot. You don't go to the plain just to see things; while here—like a feast day, you only need follow your nose, and there's always something to lead you farther: there past the bend in the road, over the stream, there to that spruce, up over the clearing, and then, when you've got there, into the wood: the wood faces the midday sun, all beech-trees, the trunks light and grey, as if mist were lying there; and here, there, everywhere cyclamen in flower, like tiny glowing flames. And here, look what a pale brown mushroom, it lifts the dead leaves, ah, what a sturdy white stem; and do you know what! I shall let you stay, mushroom, and I shan't pick you either, cuckoo-flowers and campanulas, but a bunch of strawberries for Hafia, down below at the edge of the wood, where they are sweetest. Hórdubal stopped and held his breath: deer; there on the other slope a doe was standing, blond and sleek, like last autumn's leaves, she stood in the bracken, alert and inquisitive. What are you, a man or a stump? A stump, a butt, a black branch,

but don't run away, what, even you are afraid of me, wild creature? No, she's not afraid; she bubbles a tiny leaf, she looks, chews her cud like a goat. Beh, beh, she says, she stamps her little hooves, and trots away. And Juraj was suddenly overwhelmed with joy, he went upward with a light step, thinking of nothing. He just went, and went, feeling at peace with the world. I have seen some deer, he will say to Hafia in the evening—ooh, where? Well, up there—there are no deer, Hafia, in the plain.

And here it is already—nobody knows what it is really some kind of a log hut, now in pieces, logs strewn about, but logs. Good Lord, a belfry might be built of them, grown over with Night-shade, and Herb-Paris, with wild lilies, Veratrum, Crane's-bill, and ferns, truly, a strange spot, as if haunted—here the wood faces north, a dark wood, grown over with moss, the soil is black, and squelchy, yes, it's haunted here, they say, and some mushrooms, whitish, translucent, like jelly, wood sorrel, and darkness, always so dark here, not even a squirrel to be heard or a little fly; it's such a dark wood, young children are frightened to come here, and even a big chap crosses himself. But here already is the edge of the

wood, you wade through bilberries up to your knees, and lift the branches, and see how much lichen hangs here, brambles catch you by the legs, eh, man, it's not so easy to get through the wood to the upland clearing, you must tear your way through the thicket like a boar; and bang! as if you had been shot out of the wood, as if the wood itself shot you out, you stand in the clearing, praise be to Jesus Christ, here we are!

The clearing is wide: spruce-trees here and there, big and mighty like the church, you could take your hat off, and greet them aloud; and the grass, velvety, smooth, very short, you walk on it as if on a carpet; the long and wide clearing between the woods, it stretches far and wide, it has the sky above, it has gathered the woods round its waist: like a man who bares his chest, and lies, lies, and looks up into God's windows—ah, ahah, that's breath for him! And Juraj Hordubal felt suddenly as small as a little ant, and he ran over the wide clearing, where to, little ant? Well, there, up to the top; do you see there, those little red ants grazing? That's where I'm making for. The clearing is big.

Big, sir: you would say a herd of oxen? Those

red dots? God has it very nice: he looks down, and says to himself: that black dot there is someone called Hordubal, that bright dot there is Polana; I must look and see, will those two dots meet? or shall I push them together with my finger? And here from the hill something black dashes directly at me; it runs, it rolls down the slope, what are you? Oh, you are a black cur, you'll bark yourself hoarse, get off, do I look like a robber? Come here, you're a brave little dog, I'm going to the herdsman up there. Already you can hear the cow-bells. Hajza, the herdsman kept shouting: the oxen with big, quiet eyes gazed at Juraj, they swished their tails, and went on grazing; the herdsman stood motionless, like a juniper-tree, and looked round for the newcomer.

"Hi," cried Juraj, "is that you, Misa? Well, thanks be to God!"

Misa said nothing, he only stared.

"You don't know me? I'm Hordubal!"

"Ah, Hordubal," said Misa, without surprise; why should he be surprised?

"I've come back from America."

"What?"

"From America."

“Oh, from America.”

“Whose cattle are you looking after, Misa?”

“What?”

“Whose cattle are they?”

“Oh, whose cattle. From Kriva.”

“So, so, from Kriva. Nice beasts. And what about you, Misa, are you all right? I’ve come to have a look at you.”

“What?”

“Well, to have a look at you.”

Misa said nothing, he only blinked his eyes. One’s not used to talking up here. Hordubal lay down on the grass, propping himself up on his elbow, and he began to chew a piece of grass. It’s a different world here, you needn’t talk, it’s not necessary. From April till September Misa watches the herds here, he doesn’t see a soul for a week at a time——

“And what, Misa, have you ever been down there on the plain?”

“What?”

“Have you been on the plain, Misa?”

“Oh, on the plain. No, never.”

“And up there, on the Durnoj, have you been there?”

"Yes, I have."

"And there behind that hill, you haven't been there?"

"No, I haven't."

So you see, and I—I've been as far as America; and what have I got for it? I can't even understand my wife—

"There—there are other pastures there," said Misa

"And tell me," inquired Juraj, as he used to when he was a boy. "What was that log hut in the wood?"

"What?"

"That log hut, there in the wood."

"Oh, that log hut." Misa thoughtfully pulled at his clay pipe "Who knows? The robbers wanted to build a fortress there, they say. But who knows?"

"And is it really haunted there?"

"Oh, that," said Misa vaguely.

Hordubal turned over on his back. It's fine here, he thought to himself; what's going on down there below?—already you yourself don't know. People swarm there in the farmyard, they get in each other's way, it's a wonder they don't go for one another

like cocks; till your tongue aches because it itches so much to shout out——

“Have you got a wife, Misa?”

“What?”

“—whether you have got a wife?”

“No, I haven’t.”

In the plain there aren’t clouds like these; the sky’s empty there, but here—like the cows on the clearing; you lie on your back and mind them. And it’s as if they were sailing, and you were sailing with them, sailing away somehow, strange that you are so light and can soar with them. Where are they going, these clouds, where are they off to in the evening? As if they melted away, but can anything vanish like that?

Hordubal leaned on his elbow. “I wanted to ask you, Misa—do you know a herb for love? So that perhaps a girl might fall in love with you?”

“Oh,” murmured Misa, “I don’t need that.”

“Not you, but someone else might.”

“And what for?” inquired Misa, indignantly.
“There’s no need.”

“But do you know such plants?”

“I don’t.” Misa spat out. “I’m no gipsy.”

"But you know how to cure people, Misa, don't you?"

Misa said nothing, he only blinked his eyes. "You don't know what you'll die of," he said suddenly.

Hordubal sat erect with a throbbing heart. "Do you think, Misa, that . . . soon?"

Misa blinked thoughtfully. "Oh, God knows. Does a man live long?"

"And how old are you, Misa?"

"What?"

"How old are you?"

"Oh, that I don't know. What's the good of knowing?"

Ba, what's the good of knowing? Juraj murmured; what's the good of knowing?—say, what's Polana thinking about? Down there a man torments himself with it; but here—well, think what you like, my dear, if you were happy you wouldn't think. It's strange, how far away everything is from here, so far, that you feel homesick. A man feels—as if he were looking on himself as well from a great height, as he runs—about the yard, gets angry, and worried, and all the while he's just a little ant, irritated, not knowing how to get out.

A great peace fell on Juraj, so great that it was like a pain. Look at him, such a rough and strong fellow, and he sighs, sighs under the burden of relief. Ah, I shouldn't like to get up yet, and take it down into the valley, and how about not liking: I couldn't. To lie silently, silently, so that it gets straightened out; to lie like this for days, perhaps for weeks, and wait till it falls into place; let the sky turn round, let the ox put his head down and sniff, let the marmot peep, is it a stone? it's a stone, and hop on it to sit up and sniff. With his hands spread out Hordubal lay on his back. There is no Hordubal, or even a Polana—only the sky, the earth, and the sound of the cow-bells. The clouds melt away, and nothing is left behind, not even as much as when you breathe on the glass. The ox thinks what a struggle he has, and it is only cow-bells from afar. What's the use of knowing? Gaze. God gazes, too. What a big eye, peaceful like the eye of a beast. The wind, as if time itself were flowing and roaring; where can it all come from? And what's the use of knowing?

Evening came on, and Juraj began to descend, he went over the clearing, and slipped into the wood, with long and light steps he walked; the burden of

peace had already settled into place in him, and he need not even think of it. All right, Polana, all right, I shan't run about under your nose any longer, the yard is too small for two of us. I shall find a job somewhere, and if not, I shall sit up here, and wait, wait till the evening. Why not—does a man live long? Why, I ask you, should two little ants get in one another's way? there is so much space that you don't even understand where it all comes from, and I—even from a distance I can look. Praise be to God, there are hills enough from which you can see your home. You can crawl as far as the Creator's collar, and look down at yourself. Like the clouds, rise—and dissolve, like breath.

Already the cow-hells could be heard, but still Hordubal sat on the thyme-covered baulk with a bunch of strawberries in his hand, and looked down on the new red roof. The farmyard, too, could be seen like the palm of a hand. To take Hafia there, and show her. See here, Hafia, isn't it like a toy? In the yard a small bright little figure emerges, and stands, stands. And there, see, from the stable a dark little figure comes out, goes up to her, and also stands still. And they don't move—like toys. Ants

would wave their feelers, and run about, but men—are more mysterious: they stand next to one another, and nothing happens. What's the good of knowing? thought Hordubal, but it's strange that they stand so long, so motionless; one's uneasy—it's dreadful that they stand so motionless. And was it peace, Juraj, that you brought with you from up there? The heaviness that knocks you down? You have had too much of something up there, and it's sadness; you spread your hands out, and now you carry a cross. And those two there below stand, stand—ah, Jesus, if only they would move at last! And then the bright little figure tore itself away, and went in; the dark one stands, doesn't move, and, glory to God, already it's gone.

Hordubal returned with a bunch of strawberries—he had nothing but that little bunch, and yet he forgot it in the yard. Four people at the evening table; he was almost on the point of beginning—I saw some deer, Hafia—but he didn't say anything, words stuck in his mouth like pieces of food, Polana ate nothing, as pale as if she were carved out of bone, Stepan scowled over his plate, screwed his face about, crushed bread with his fingers, suddenly

threw his knife down, and ran out as if he were choking.

"What's the matter with uncle Stepan?" murmured Hafia.

Polana said nothing, she gathered the plates from the table, so deadly pale that her teeth chattered.

And Hordubal took himself away to the cows, the bald-headed one turned her head towards him, until her chain rattled. What is it, master? Why do you sigh so loudly? Eh, bald one, what's the use of knowing, what's the use of knowing?—but it's heavy, heavier than a chain. Up there we could make our bells ring, you and I—what space there is, there's space for God there, too, but among men it's close, two, three people, bald head, and so close together! can't you hear their chains rattling?

THAT night Manya got drunk, like a beast; not in Kriva, but away at Tolcemes, at the Jew's; he fought with the other fellows, and he used his knife and got stabbed, they say, who knows; towards morning he returned, swollen and sore, and now he sleeps it out in the stable. The horses ought to be watered, thought Juraj, but I shan't meddle with your affairs. If I'm not to talk to them, all right; look after them yourself. And Polana—like a shadow, better not see her. Well, things are in a state. Hordubal frowned. What is one to do?

It was hot, hot as if it were going to thunder: nasty flies, oh, what a vile day! Juraj slouched into the orchard behind the barn; but even there somehow—What is there to do here? Only the nettles smell, and why are there so many broken pots here? such gipsy rubbish—Polana's like a shadow: she stays somewhere inside the house, and nothing—God be with you; but you know it's hard for a man here. Hordubal uneasily rubbed his moist neck. Well, the storm will come, Stepan ought to cart the hay home——

He climbed over the fence, and made his way round behind the village, to look at the sky, what it was like. The village from the back—as if you looked at a table from underneath, all wood and framework, as if nobody saw you, as if you were playing hide and seek with the whole world; just fences, and burdocks, savoys eaten with caterpillars, here a refuse dump, hemlocks, thorn-apples, and gipsies, gipsy huts behind the village—Juraj halted, and hesitated: oh, God, where am I! Polana is alone, Stepan unconscious in the stable. . . . Hordubal's heart began to thump. Devil take the gipsy! She just sat on the ground, old crone, dreadful, combing a child for lice.

"And what would you like, sir," the gipsy woman croaked.

"Gipsy, gipsy," shuddered Juraj, "can you make a love ponon?"

"Ei, I can," the gipsy woman grinned, "and what will you give me?"

"A dollar, an American dollar," Hordubal burst out, "two dollars—"

"Wah, you carrion," the gipsy woman cried, "for two dollars, look here, you can't couple a dog for two dollars, you can't even charm a cow—"

“Ten dollars,” whispered Hordubal in excitement, “ten, gipsy!”

The gipsy woman grew calm at once. “Give them to me,” she commanded, stretching out a dirty paw.

Juraj’s fingers trembled as he rummaged feverishly for the money. “But make a good charm, gipsy, not for a night, not for a month, not for a year—— So that the heart grows soft, the tongue loose, so that she will be glad to see me——”

“Hi,” the gipsy murmured, “Ilka, make a fire!” She rummaged in her bag, her hands were hooked and wrinkled like a bird’s claws. Ah, what a shame! The sky is growing wilder, there will be a storm. Make it, gipsy, make it well—Eh, Polana, look where you’ve taken me!

The gipsy prattled, throwing pinches from her bag into the little cauldron; it smelt vile; she mumbled something, shaking her head, and making charms with her claws. It was terrible for Juraj. Let me fall down on the spot! This for you, Polana, for you, only you—What a crime!

Juraj ran home, carrying the charm, he ran, the storm was coming. The cows were trotting with their load of sheaves, children scampering home,

the dust rose in columns. Perspiring freely Hordubal opened the little gate leading to his home, he had to stop and lean, his heart throbbed, that for you, Polana. And suddenly from the stable the three-year-old ran out, stopped, neighed, and galloped to the gate.

"O-o-o!" shouted Juraj, waving his arms to stop him. Polana ran out from the house. The horse was up on its hind legs, it spun round, dashed round the yard, with its head high, and its back pressed down, and it dug its hooves into the ground.

And where has Hafia got to? She ran across the yard to her mammy, squealing with terror, and fell . . . Polana shrieked, and Hordubal gave a roar. Oh, wooden legs! Why don't I dash forwards——? And then from the stable Manya flew, his white sleeves fluttered, the horse reared itself up, and to its mane a man was hanging, he tore at the horse, eh, you don't shake him off, like a wild cat on its neck. The horse sprang away, shook its head, threw its back up; bang, Manya was on the ground, but he clung to the mane, kneeling, and tore at the horse. And only then did Hordubal's legs untie themselves, and he ran for Hafia. The horse dragged Manya

over the yard, but Stepan now dug his heels in, and pulled, pulled at the mane. Hordubal pressed the child to his breast, he would have liked to carry it away, but he forgot—such a sight it was; the man and the beast. Polana's hands were on her heart. Then Manya gave a high-pitched laugh, neighed like a horse, and galloping and jumping he led the snorting stallion into the stable.

"Now, take the child," said Hordubal, but Polana heard nothing. "Polana, do you hear, Polana?"

For the first time Juraj put his hand on her shoulder. "Polana, Hafsa!" She lifted her eyes. Ah, have you ever had such eyes before, have you ever breathed like this, with your mouth half open? How beautiful you were—and now it's vanished.

"Nothing happened to her," she mumbled as she carried the sobbing child into the house.

Manya emerged from the stable, he wiped the blood from his nose with his sleeve, he spat blood from his mouth. "It's all right now," he said.

"Come," muttered Hordubal, "come, Stepan, let me bathe your head."

Stepan snorted with delight under the stream of water, and splashed cheerfully and copiously. "But

that was a job, wasn't it?" he pratiled in a lively tone. "The little stallion got rattled, muster, that's why he was so wild" Manya showed his teeth, he was wet and dishevelled. "Eh, he will be a stallion!"

Juraj wanted to say to Stepan: Well, you are a champion, you did do it well; but among men—there's no need. "There will be a storm," he murmured, and strolled away behind the barn. In the south the sky was heavy, storms which come from below are never good. The little stallion got rattled, and one can't even move one's legs to save the child. Maybe I'm already old, Polana, or what. Strange, my legs were like wood, as if charmed.

Lord, how dark! It began to thunder. The gipsy woman made a charm, and see, the little stallion got rattled; and I didn't catch hold of the horse's mane, nothing, only shuddered, and gaped. I, no, but Stepan did. Why shouldn't he, he's young? Ah, Polana, Polana, why did you look so, why were you so beautiful!

And already it was there, there; the storm—like a frightened horse it ran, sparks from under its hooves, neighing. You don't catch hold of the horse's mane any more, your legs won't let you,

they falter. You don't spring, don't yell; Stepan does. Damn, it's a miserable charm from that gipsy: the little stallion got rattled, and so. And you think: That's all for Polana. So why didn't you spring at the horse? Polana would have looked with her hands on her breast, and her eyes—as never.

Juraj blinked his eyes, he didn't even feel the warm drops on his face. The sky was rent, crashed, and rattled; Hordubal crossed himself hurriedly, and felt an urge to run for shelter. No, not yet, first throw the gipsy woman's charm into the nettles. And then with a jump under the shed and watch the storm.

XII

WHERE else would he be? He had crawled behind the barn, to think. For instance, he thought: Well, let's admit that I'm old, but I ask you, how does it happen? You live, you feel nothing, you are the same as yesterday, and suddenly—old. As if somebody had bewitched you. You don't catch hold of a frightened horse by the mane any more, you don't fight in the pub any more; you pick up the child instead of catching the horse. And to show you, once upon a time even I fought in the pub, gloriously, with Geric, in fact, ask Vasil, Polana. And suddenly—old, Polana's not old

Well, then, perhaps I'm old. To pick up a child is also good. Eh, Polana, I could show you—for instance, what a farmer I am. You could live like a lady, maids to do the work, and you only shout: Hi, Maryka, feed the hens, now then, Axena, water the cows. It's true they stole three thousand dollars of mine, but I still have seven hundred, we might start on many things. Ah, my dear, I wasn't in America for nothing; young, not young, at least I've learned

how and what in the world. And that it doesn't pay to keep cows, they say, and such-like things. What about it, you must know how to sell. In America, say—there a farmer doesn't wait till the butcher comes; he goes himself to the town, and makes a contract: so much and so many times a year, so many and so many churns of milk a day, all right. That's how it's done. I ask you, why shouldn't it do here as well? Buy a pony and a cart—sell your horses, Polana, I want a pony that you can talk to—and drive to town. Well, the American knows his way about, he didn't go abroad for nothing; he takes home a belt full of money. And then the neighbours would come—Could you, Juraj, sell for us a couple of geese in the town? Why couldn't I, but not like this, with only one goose under my arm; but fifty, a hundred geese a week—I should make coops, and off with a load of geese to town. That, my friends, is how business is done. Or wood for burning, fifty loads of wood. Potatoes—in wagons. Look at Hordubal, what ideas he's brought back with him from America! And even you, Polana, would say, Juraj is clever, no youngster could be more active; Hi, Maryka, Axena, take master's boots off, he's

back from the market. And what have you been doing all the day, my dear? I looked after the farm for you, scolded the servants, and then, well, I've been waiting, Juraj, for you.

Hordubal sat on a stump, and blinked his eyes. Try it, why not? A fellow is young as long as he begins something new. And if not that, well, in a different way. For instance, buy the rock below Mencul—stone like marble, and cart the blocks to town; Good Lord, have they any stone in the plain? Only mud and dust, the sky is dusty, too. And perhaps break the stone oneself—didn't I break a bit of stone in America? And dynamite, my friend, I can manage. You make a hole, put the cartridge in—all clear, bang—and crash! Well, Polana, that's a man's job, what? What's catching a little stallion compared with it? And with a red flag in your hand—look out, they're firing the charge. I should make glorious bangs, and you other one—you catch horses in the field. Oh, there are still things here to be found out. What have you got in the plain? Nothing, the plain. But here—near Kysla Voda there's iron, the water is all brown with rust. Under Tataruka some kind of glistening stone like pitch. Old women

say that there are treasures in the mountains. Walk about the hills as far as beyond Durny there, beyond Cernyvrch, beyond Tatinska, beyond Tupa—who knows what might be found. Oh, my friend, in these days they search even below the ground. At home nothing, not a word. To-morrow, Polana, I'm going to Prague, to talk with some gentlemen about something—and stop. And then experts will come, and straight to Hordubal's: Good day, is Mr. Hordubal at home? And Mr. Hordubal here, Mr. Hordubal there; you have found a treasure, a mineral that we've been looking for for fifty years.—Well, why not? All stone, they say—ah, do you know what that stone is made of? You don't, so don't talk.

Hordubal felt rather ashamed. Perhaps these are silly ideas; but the stone below Mencul—isn't silly. For that I must have oxen, a pair, two pairs of oxen—say those from Podoli, grey ones, with horns like arms, ah, what animals! And with a load of stone into the plain—to walk in front of the oxen, and only hi up, hazza! And you with your horses—make way for the oxen, to the other side of the ditch! And whose oxen are they? Hordubal's, nobody in the country has such animals.

Hordubal took the little bag from under his shirt and counted his money over. Seven hundred dollars, that's over twenty thousand: very nice, Polana! With that we can begin a new life. But you will see yourself what a champion Juraj is. And that wisdom is strength. A horse like that which carries its head high is worth a lot, but look at an ox: he nods his head, he carries the yoke on his back, but he does more work.

Juraj nodded, and strolled into the yard. In the yard Polana was shelling green peas, she just raised her eyebrows, swept the empty pods from her lap, and turned into the house.

XIII

HORDUBAL sat in the pub, and felt happy. Praise be to God, to-day it's noisy here: Michalcuk's here, and Varvarin, Mechajl's Poderejcuk, Herpak called Kobyla, Fedeles Michal, and Fedeles Gejza, Feduk, Hryc, Alexa, Hryhorij, and Dodja the ranger, all neighbours, and to shoot wild boars, they say, they do a lot of damage in the fields. Hryhorij owns the rock below Mencul, it would be a good thing to talk with him, to begin at the thin end, and cautiously: for instance, that the road into the fields ought to be mended with stone. Eh, thought Juraj in annoyance, but I haven't any fields now. Pjosa has them, he sits there and frowns. I've got no fields, what do I care about the wild brutes? Let them chase them away themselves; what I—I don't belong here. Hordubal felt gloomy; let them look after their own troubles, I've got mine.

In the meantime the men discussed what and how, when to begin, and from which side. Juraj slowly sipped his beer, and thought of his own worries. She just raised her eyebrows, and into the house.

Well, Polana; sometime perhaps you would like to begin, and then, Juraj, what about this and what about that; and I shall just raise my eyebrows, and go to the pub. So that you may also know how it feels. What, have I a mangy snout, what, do my eyes run, or have I a dreadful mug like the tramp Laslo? Yes, I'm old, and everywhere coal has eaten into me, I'm all gristle, nothing else is left of me; all back because I crawled on all fours in the mine; all paws, and all knees—if you only knew in what tight places I had to hack the coal! Even now, when I cough, I spit black, Polana. Well, there's not much of me that you can like; but I can work, my dear, and you will see—

"Hi, American," grinned Fedelecs Gejza, "you haven't shown yourself yet. Well, have you come to treat your countrymen?"

Hordubal nodded. "I have, I have, but to treat them in the American fashion Jew, bring Gejza a glass of water! And if it's not enough for you, Gejza, a whole pail, at least you can wash your mug in it."

"And is my mug any concern of yours," laughed Gejza, "if my wife likes it?"

Juraj's face darkened. What does your wife matter

to me? Look at him, to treat him! And what, I would; ah, God, neighbours, I would gladly drink with you, hold shoulders with you, and sing, sing till my eyes closed. But I've got my dollars for other things; I've got an idea, a good one, an American one. But wait till I begin to blow the stone up. Good Lord, Hordubal, has he gone mad? Aren't there enough stones here? And after a while—see, the American, he can skim cream even from a rock.

Fedeles Michal began to sing, the others joined in. Ah, it's good to be among the lads. How long is it since I heard—how long ago now— Juraj half closed his eyes, and in a subdued voice he joined in—taida—taida—taida, and suddenly—the deuce knows what made him begin to crow—he sang, sang, sang at the top of his voice, until his whole body swayed with the tune.

"Hi, you," shouted Fedeles Gejza. "A fellow who won't drink with us ought not to sing with us. Sing at home, Hordubal!"

"Or bring Stepan here," said Jura Feduk, joining in. "They say he knows how to sing better than you."

Hordubal got up, there was no end to him, he

almost reached to the ceiling. "You sing, Gejza," he said mildly. "I was ready to go home in any case."

"And what should you do at home?" grinned Fedeleš Michal. "You've got a workman there."

"He's a big farmer," Gejza hinted. "He pays a man to work for his wife."

Hordubal turned sharply. "Gejza," he muttered between his teeth, "who do you mean?"

Gejza rocked spitefully on his feet. "Who? There's only one farmer like that."

The men began to get up. "Let him be, Gejza," Varvarin begged; somebody took Juraj gently by the shoulders, and led him away. Hordubal tore himself free, and went up to Fedeleš, it was a wonder that he didn't touch him with his nose.

"Who?" he said hoarsely.

"There's only one so daft," said Fedeleš Gejza, very distinctly, and then suddenly, as if he lashed out: "But whores like Polana are common enough."

"Come out," cried Hordubal hoarsely, making his way out of the pub, between the shoulders of the other fellows. Gejza followed him behind, he opened the clasp-knife in his pocket. Mind, Hordubal, mind your back! But Hordubal paid no heed, he forced

his way out, with Gejza behind him, the clasp-knife in his hand held so tightly that his palm sweated.

They all crowded out of the pub. Juraj turned to Fedeleš: "You," he muttered. "Well, come!"

Gejza had his hand with the clasp-knife behind his back, he grunted deeply, ready to spring; but Hordubal, with arms like a windlass for a well, caught him by the hips, hands or no hands, he lifted him, spun round, and threw him to the ground. Gejza fell on his feet, hissing with rage. Again Hordubal lifted him high, and threw him to the ground, up high, and to the ground, as if he wanted to beat the floor with him; suddenly Gejza's knees gave way beneath him, and he dropped to the ground, with his arms spread out, and crash! his head banged against a bucket, and he lay as if he were only a heap of clothes.

Hordubal breathed heavily, looking round at the men with bloodshot eyes. "I didn't know," he murmured apologetically, "that there was a bucket there."

At that moment he received a whack on his head, and another, and another. Two, three, four men silently struck Hordubal on the head till it rattled.

"Get off," he roared, waving his arms in the darkness; he struck somebody's nose, sank to the ground, and tried to get up. "They're fighting," yelled someone; Hordubal tried to get up, he couldn't, he tried to get up under the blows, and groaned, Oh—oh, and still he tried to get up——

"What, you here!" cried a quick and breathless voice, and crashed with a horse-whip into the gasping heap. And on their heads! Somebody howled with rage, look out for the knives! Vasil Geric Vasilov breathed heavily, and brought the horse-whip in jerks across Hordubal's body. Juraj tried to get up. "Clear off, you," the mayor thundered, lashing with his whip. Ah, if you weren't an official, and what an official! But Vasil Geric Vasilov is a famous fighter. And then even the women came cautiously into the road, with their hands folded, looking in the direction of the pub.

Juraj Hordubal tried to get up, his head was on Vasil's knee, and someone was washing his face, it was Pjosa. "That wasn't a fair fight, Vasil," the American groaned. "They struck me from behind, and two to one——"

Ach, Juraj, there were six of them, the bastards,

and they all had sticks from the fence. Your head must be made of oak, or it would have cracked. "And what about Gejza?" the battered one inquired anxiously.

"Gejza has had enough, they've taken him away," the mayor explained.

Juraj sighed with satisfaction. "He'll keep his mouth shut now, the swine," he murmured, trying to get up; praise be to God, he felt better already, he stood and held his head. "Why did they go for me like that?" he wondered. "Come and have a drink, Vasil. They wouldn't let me sing, the dirty devils."

"Go home, Juraj," the mayor advised him. "I'll go with you, they may be waiting for you somewhere."

"As if I were afraid of them," said Hordubal gaining courage, and he staggered home. No, I'm not drunk, Polana, but they beat me at the pub. Why did they do it? Only for fun, my dear, for a lark, I tried my strength with Fedeles Gejza.

"And do you know, Vasil," explained Juraj, somehow exhilarated, "I had a fight in America, lad, a miner went for me with a hammer, a German or

something, but the others—they took the hammer away from him, and made a ring, and then we fought; but only with our bare fists. Eh, Vasil, I got a whack on my mouth, but the German went to the ground. And nobody interfered."

"You, Juraj," advised Geric seriously. "Don't go into the pub again, or there'll be another fight."

"And why?" exclaimed Hordubal in astonishment. "I didn't do anything to them, did I?"

"Well," said the mayor evasively, "they've got to fight with somebody. Go to sleep, Juraj; and tomorrow—send that workman away."

Hordubal darkened. "What do you say, Geric? Are you going to meddle with my affairs too?"

"Why have a stranger in your home?" said Vasil evasively. "Go, go to bed. Eh, Juraj, Polana isn't worth fighting for."

Hordubal stood still like a pillar, and blinked. "So, even you are as mean—as the others," he at last was able to say. "You don't know, Polana, you—— Only I know her, and you——don't you dare——"

Vasil put his hand on his shoulder. "Juraj, for eight years we've had her under our eyes——"

Hordubal quickly tore himself away: "Go, go, or—Geric, as long as I live, as God is above me, I don't know you, and you were my best pal."

Hordubal didn't turn round again, and he staggered home. Geric only gave a snort, and long and silently he swore in the darkness.

XIV

IN the morning Stepan harnessed the horses to the wagon, he was going down into the plain. Hordubal came out from the cow-shed, he looked queer, swollen, and with bloodshot eyes. "I'm coming with you, Stepan," he said shortly.

C-c, the wagon flew through the village, but Juraj didn't look at the people or the horses. And a bit behind the village, "Stop," he ordered, "and get down from the wagon, I want to tell you something."

With insolent and flashing eyes Stepan scrutinized the battered face of his master. "Well, what?"

"Listen, Manya," began Hordubal in a faltering voice. "There are vile rumours about Polana—and you I know they're lies—but we must stop them. Do you understand?"

Stepan shrugged his shoulders. "No, I don't."

"You must leave us, Stepan. It's—because of Polana. To shut peoples' mouths. It has to be, do you understand?"

Stepan fixed insolent eyes on the evasive ones of his master. "I do."

Juraj waved his hand. "And now, be off with you."

Manya stood still, clenched his fists, and looked as if he wanted to fight.

"You've got your work to do, Stepan," murmured Hordubal.

"Very well," hissed Stepan; he swung himself up into the wagon, turned round with the whip, and crash! he struck the horses over the head.

The horses backed, reared, and broke into a wild gallop; the wagon flew and rattled as if it would break into a thousand pieces.

Hordubal stood on the road, enveloped in dust; then he slowly made his way back to the village, walking home with lowered head. Eh, Juraj, that's how the old people go.

XV

In a week Hordubal grew thin, like a skeleton. And why not, I ask you? Is it a small thing to get things straight in the morning, feed the pigs, curry-comb the horses, take the cows to the pasture, clean the cow-shed, and get the child off to school; then go with the horses down to the plain, the maize is ready for harvest; home at midday, cook something for the child's dinner, water the horses, feed the hens; and again go to the plain for a bit of work, then in the evening come home quickly, get supper ready, look after the cattle, with clumsy fingers even mend Hafia's little skirt; well, a child must play, how soon she tears her frock. It's difficult to be in so many places at once, it's hard not to forget one for the other. In the evening he sank into the straw like a log of wood, and still he could not fall asleep because of worries, whether he had forgotten something. Ah, God, he had, he hadn't watered the geraniums in the window; and Hordubal got up wearily to water the geraniums.

And Polana--as if she didn't exist; she locked

herself in the room and sulked. What to do, thought Hordubal, greatly embarrassed; the wife is angry, because I didn't ask her advice. What do you think, Polana, I want to send the workman away. Eh, woman, have sense after all: could I have told you, Polana, such and such rumours as there are about you? And what am I to tell you; well, I sent the workman away, be angry; I shan't drive you to work with a stick. Oh, Lord, Polana's hands are wanted here; only a week, and it's as if everything had got into a mess; who would have thought how much work a woman like that does—a man doesn't even do half as much. But she will see it herself, her temper will go, and she will laugh. What a camel is Juraj, he doesn't know how to put things straight, or cook—well, what do you expect from a man!

Once—he caught sight of her; he came back for something, and she was standing at the door. Like a shadow. Rings round her eyes, and a perpendicular furrow on her forehead. Hordubal turned away—I nothing, my dear, I haven't seen you. And she vanished—like a shadow. At night when Hordubal crawled into the straw, he heard a door open silently somewhere. That's Polana. She goes out into the

yard, and stands, stands—— And Juraj, with his hands under his head, blinked in the darkness, and shuddered.

Cows, horses, Hafia, hens, pigs, field, flowers—Lord, that's bad enough, but the worst job is to keep up appearances. So that wagging tongues won't be able to say that at Hordubal's so and so. I have a married sister, she could help, she could cook, but no, thank you nicely, we don't need her. The neighbour looks over the fence: Hordubal, send Hafia over to me for the day, I'll look after her. Thank you very much, neighbour, much obliged, but please don't bother yourself; Polana's not very well, she has to lie down a bit, I like to do her work. What, let you push your nose——! I meet Genc, he looks at me, a word of greeting is in his mouth. You go your own way, I don't know you. And Hafia is frightened, she looks at me, with open eyes—well, she misses Stepan. What was I to do, child? there were such rumours, put it to the peoples' account.

Cows, horses, maize, pigs—yes, clean out the pig-sty, and water the cows. And here, see, I must clean the ditch out so that the slush can get away. Hordubal set to work, he snorted with eagerness.

for a time the only thing in the world was the pig-sty; you wait, Polana, you'll be astonished when you come here—a pig-sty like a parlour. Now some clean water. And Hordubal went with the bucket to the well.

In the yard, on the shaft of the wagon, Manya was sitting; he played with Hafia on his knee, and talked to her about something.

Juraj set the bucket down on the ground, and with his hands in his pockets he went straight up to Stepan.

With one hand Manya moved Hafia away, and the other he put in his pocket; he sat still, with eyes as narrow as caraway seed, and something was sticking out of his hand and pointing at Hordubal's belly.

Hordubal grinned. Old boy, I know from America how to use a revolver. Here you are, he took from his pocket a clasp-knife and threw it on the ground. Manya put his hand in his pocket and kept his eyes fixed on his master.

Hordubal leant forwards with the hand on the wagon and looked down at Manya. What am I to do with you here, he thought. Lord, how am I to begin with him?

And Hafia didn't know either how it would end, and with gaping mouth she looked from her father to Stepan, and from Stepan to her father.

"Well, Hafia," murmured *Hordubal*. "Are you glad that Stepan has come back to you?"

The little girl said nothing, she only turned her eyes towards Manya.

Hordubal rubbed his neck doubtfully. "And why are you sitting here?" he said slowly. "Go and water the horses."

XVI

AND then he went straight to the room, and knocked at the door. "Let me in, Polana!"

The door opened, and Polana stood there like a shadow.

Hordubal sat down on the box, with his hands on his knees, and looked at the floor. "Manya has come back," he said.

Polana said nothing, she only breathed heavily.

"There were some—rumours," murmured Juraj. "About you . . . and about him. That's why I sent him away." He snorted with annoyance. "And he's come back, the rogue. Things can't go on like this, Polana."

"Why?" burst out Polana sharply. "Because of those stupid rumours?"

Hordubal nodded gravely. "Because of those stupid rumours, Polana. We're not the only ones here. Stepan—is a man, let him defend his own self against human tongues; but, you—eh, Polana, after all, I'm your husband—at least in public. So there."

Polana leaned against the door, her legs felt weak, and she didn't speak.

"It seems," murmured Hordubal, "it seems that Hafia is used to Stepan—he's good with the child. And horses—they miss Manya. He worked them hard, but even that they liked." Juraj lifted his eyes. "What should you say, Polana, if we betrothed Hafia to Stepan?"

Polana's heart sank. "But that is impossible," she cried in terror.

"Yes, that's true, Hafia is young," said Hordubal thoughtfully. "But to betroth isn't to give away. In the old times, Polana, they betrothed even children in the cradle."

"But Stepan—Hafia is fifteen years younger than he is," objected Polana.

Juraj nodded. "Like you, my dear. It's sometimes like that. But Manya can't stay here like a stranger. As Hafia's bridegroom—that's different: he belongs to the family, he's working for his little wife—"

It began to dawn on Polana. "And could he stay here then?" she asked, tense and breathless.

"Yes, why shouldn't he? As if he were with his

own parents. Who's the stranger? He's our son-in-law. And peoples' mouths would be shut. At least they'd see that . . . that it was only spiteful gossip. That's because of you, Polana. And otherwise—well, it seems as if he likes Hafia—and he understands horses. He's not keen on work, it's true—but does a hard worker ever get rich?"

Polana was so perplexed that she began to frown. "And do you think that Stepan would be willing?"

"He will, my dear. I've got some money—well, he can have it. I ask you, what am I to do with the money? And Stepan—is greedy; he would like to have fields, horses, the plain as far as you can see—his eyes will just shine. He'll fall on his feet—will he think it over!"

And Polana's face again became impenetrable. "Well, do as you like, Juraj. But I shan't tell him about it."

Juraj rose. "I shall tell him myself. Don't worry. I shall even get advice on this and that from a lawyer. There will have to be some kind of an agreement, I think. Well, I'll even arrange for that."

Hordubal stood waiting, perhaps he thought that

Polana would say something. But she was suddenly seized with activity: "I must get the supper ready."

And Juraj strolled behind the barn as he used to do before.

MANYA took his master to Rybary, to talk with his parents. C-c. The horses, with their heads up, were a pleasure to look at.

“And so you, Stepan,” said Hordubal pensively, “you have an elder brother, a younger one, and a married sister... Hm, there are enough of you. And tell me, isn’t it flat in your district?”

“Flat,” said Stepan quickly, and his teeth shone. “We breed buffaloes mainly—and horses. Buffaloes do well in the swamp, mister.”

A swamp, thought Juraj. “And wouldn’t it be possible to drain it? I’ve seen that kind of thing in America.”

“Why drain it?” laughed Stepan. “There’s land enough, mister. It would be a pity for the swamp, reeds grow there; we make baskets in the winter. We have wicker instead of planks. Wagons of wicker work; fences, stables—all made of wicker, look at that lambing pen there.”

Juraj didn’t like the plain, it was endless, but what could he do? “And your father’s alive, you say.”

"Alive. He'll be astonished to see who I'm bringing him," said Manya rather proudly, boyishly. "But there, that's Rybary already." And with his little hat stuck at the back of his head, cracking his whip, he drove Juraj, like a baron, into the village and up to the Manyas' home.

A small, stocky boy came out of the hut. "Look here, Dula," shouted Stepan. "Put these horses under cover, and give them a drink and a feed of oats. This way, mister."

Hordubal just ran his eye over the farm; the tumble-down barn, the pigs rooting in the yard, hen turkeys preening their feathers; in the framework of the door a big bodkin was sticking——

"That's a bodkin, sir, for making the baskets," Stepan explained. "And we shall build a new barn in the spring."

On the doorstep old Manya was standing with a long moustache under his nose. "I've brought you, dad, the farmer from Kriva," announced Stepan, puffing himself up. "He wants to talk with you."

Old Manya led his guest into the room, and waited suspiciously for what was to come. Hordubal sat down with dignity, but only on the end of the

chair, to make it clear that the business was not over yet. "Well, Stepan, tell him what we've come for."

Stepan showed his teeth, and poured out all the great news: that his master there would let him have his only daughter, Hafia, when she grew up; and so he wanted to talk with his father, to come to an agreement.

Hordubal nodded his head: yes, that's it.

Old Manya began to be interested. "Hi, Dula, bring some brandy! You are welcome, Hordubal; and was the journey pleasant?"

"Good."

"Thank God. And have you had a good harvest?"

"Very fair."

"And your family well?"

"Very well, thank you kindly."

Having said everything that was right and proper, old Manya began: "And so you have only one daughter, Hordubal?"

"Well, only one has come up."

The old man sniggered, but kept his wits about him. "Don't say that, Hordubal, you may have a son yet. A fallow field is fertile."

Juraj only jerked his hand to signify dissent.

"Perhaps a little boy will be born, an heir," the old man grinned, keeping his eyes open all the time. "And you look well, Hordubal; you will farm for fifty years yet."

Hordubal slowly rubbed his neck. "Well, as God wills. But Hafia need not wait so long. Thank God, I have a dowry for her."

Old Manya's little eyes gleamed. "Why not, that's understood. In America, they say, you've only to pick up money lying on the ground, isn't that so?"

"It's not as easy as that," said Hordubal cautiously. "And you know, Manya, money. You keep it at home—they steal it; you put it in a bank—they steal it as well. A farm would be better."

"Holy truth," agreed old Manya.

"I've been looking round here," Hordubal went on considerately. "Your soil can't support many people. All swamp and common. It seems to me that a farmer would have to have lots of acres of pesta if he's going to live on it."

"Well, that's true," growled the old man suspiciously. "It's not easy to divide a farm here. Our oldest, that's Michal, should inherit the farm, and the other two—only shares."

“How much?” Juraj shot out.

Old Manya blinked with surprise. Eh, you, why don’t you give me time? “Three thousand,” he murmured, squinting at Stepan.

Hordubal quickly figured it out. “Three times three—then nine, your farm’s worth ten thousand, you say?”

“What’s that you say, three times three?” The old man was vexed. “The daughter ought to get a share as well.”

“That’s true,” admitted Hordubal. “So let’s say—thirteen.”

“Oh, no, not that,” the old man shook his head. “And you, Hordubal, you’re only joking?”

“No joking,” insisted Hordubal. “I should like to know, Manya, how much a farm like this would cost in the plain?”

Old Manya was puzzled, Stepan’s eyes bulged: will the rich man Hordubal buy Manyas’ farm?

“A farm like this you wouldn’t get for twenty thousand,” the old man faltered.

“With the whole lot?”

The old man jeered. “That’s good, Hordubal! We run four, five, horses in the yard.”

"I'm counting without the horses."

Old Manya became serious. "And after all, what do you want, Hordubal—have you come to buy the farm, or to betroth your daughter?"

Hordubal grew hot. "Buy the farm—me, buy a farm in the plain? Would I buy mud? No. Rods for whistles, eh? No, thank you, Manya, but wait a moment; if we two come to an agreement, if your Stepan is betrothed to Hafia, you would leave your farm to Stepan. After the wedding—your Michal would have his share paid out by me. And Dula as well."

"And Marja?" murmured Stepan.

"And Marja—you haven't got anyone else, have you? Let Stepan farm here in Rybary."

"And what about Michal?" the old man inquired, not being able to follow.

"Well, he will get his share, let him go with God. A young man—he would rather have money than land."

Old Manya shook his head. "No, no," he murmured. "That won't do."

"And why shouldn't it?" Stepan burst out eagerly.

"You get out of here, hurry up," the old man

cried. "What has our talk got to do with you?"

Growling and offended Stepan slouched into the yard. Dula, of course, was with the horses.

"Well, what about it, Dula?" said Stepan, putting his hand on his shoulder.

"A nice horse," said the boy like an expert. "Can I have a ride on him?"

"Too good for your backside," murmured Stepan, nodding his head in the direction of the room. "Our old man——"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. He's doing what he can to spoil my happiness."

"What happiness?"

"Oh, nothing. What do you know!"

Silence reigned in the yard, only the sow grunted to herself; the corncrakes could be heard in the swamp, and the frogs had begun.

"And shall you stay in Kriva, Stepan?"

"Perhaps—I've not decided yet," boasted Stepan.

"And how about the mistress?"

"That's none of your business," said Stepan darkly. Look at the mosquitoes! And the swallows,

it's a wonder they don't scrape the ground with their bellies Stepan yawned nearly wide enough to dislocate his jaw. What are the old beggars up to inside there? Let them bite their noses off!

Stepan was ruffled, and out of boredom he pulled the bodkin from the door frame, and stuck it in again with all his might. "Now you pull it out," he said to Dula.

Dula pulled it out. "Now who can stick it in furthest?" For a short time they amused themselves by sticking the bodkin into the door until splinters began to fly. "And what now?" said Dula. "I'm going after the girls. With you there's no fun any longer"

Dusk slowly fell, over the plain the horizon became flushed with a purple mist. Should I go in? thought Stepan. Not on purpose—hurry up, the old man said, what has our talk got to do with you? Is the American Hordubal giving his daughter to him, or to me? I ought to be able to look after myself, and instead—hurry up! And why do you order me about, raged Stepan, I already belong to another family!

At last Hordubal swayed out of the door, he was

tipsy with brandy—they must have come to some agreement, the old people—old Manya came with him, and patted him on the back. Stepan stood at the horses' heads, holding the bits by the reins, just like a groom; even Hordubal noticed it, and he nodded approvingly to Stepan.

"So on Sunday in the town," cried old Manya, and C-c, the wagon started.

"A pleasant journey!"

Stepan glanced out of the corner of his eye at his master, he didn't want to ask; perhaps he would begin himself——

"There—our river," he said, pointing with his whip.

"M . . . m."

"And there, that wagon with the reeds, that may be our Michal. We use reeds for bedding instead of straw."

"So."

And still nothing. Stepan drove the horses as nicely as he could, but his master only nodded his head. At last Manya couldn't stand it any longer. "Well, mister, how much have you given them?"

Hordubal raised his eyebrows. "What?"

"How much have you promised them, mister?"

Hordubal said nothing. Only after a little while: "Five thousand each."

Stepan thought it over, and then spat between his teeth: "Then they've robbed you, mister. Three thousand would have been enough."

"M . . . m," murmured Hordubal. "Your father—as hard as oak."

Ah, so, thought Stepan. He gives to others, and me—as if he wanted to rob me.

"And you—five thousand as well," added Hordubal. "To put into the farm, he says."

Good, thought Stepan. But now, when I'm nearly his son—how will it be with my wages? He can't pay me like a farm-hand. Perhaps he might give me that colt? Sell it, Stepan, aren't you one of us already?

"And drive properly!" commanded Hordubal.

"Yes, mister"

XVIII

THEY drove back from the town; it was sealed. They had come to a proper agreement at the Jewish lawyer's, but it had cost two hundred crowns—and put that there, if you please, and write this here. Well, a farmer is cautious with property, my lad, he doesn't want to let himself be caught; and yet he mustn't forget to make over to Hafia one-half of the farm in Rybary. Good, said the lawyer, we'll put in a clausula. Aha, my lad, there's even that in it. And then they all signed it: Juraj Hordubal three crosses, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Old Manya—three crosses. And Michal Manya, a nosegay stuck in his hat, blew himself up and signed importantly with his full name. Marja, the spouse of Janos, with a silk scarf on her head, and Stepan all festive—and still someone has to sign? Oh, no, Dula must be with the horses, and he's not yet of age. So, finished, gentlemen, and I wish you much happiness. It cost two hundred; well, a thorough job, there's even a clausula in it.

And then all to the pub, to drink on it. Willy nilly

Juraj Hordubal talked familiarly with old Manya, they even quarrelled as if they were relatives. "And let's go, Stepan." Stepan would have liked to talk with Hordubal as if he were his father, but was any talk possible with him? He sat on the wagon, holding on with both hands, deep in thought, and he hardly spoke. This is a strange betrothal, eh, thought Stepan; you never feel at ease with the master. C-c.

And so they drove into Kriva at a nice trot, the horse-shoes clattered. Juraj Hordubal peered out from beneath his brows, and suddenly, with his hand above his head, he snapped his fingers, and sang, whooped, and yelled as if he were at a carnival. He must be drunk—the people turned. Why is Hordubal the American in such high spirits? On the village green there were girls and boys, they had to drive at a walking pace, Juraj stood up, placed one hand on Stepan's shoulder, and shouted to the people. "What do you say to the son-in-law I'm bringing? Eh, hurrah!"

Stepan tried to shake himself free, and hissed: "Keep quiet, mister."

Hordubal gripped his shoulder, so that Manya nearly cried out with pain. "Look here," he cried,

"I've got a son-in-law for Hafia, we're celebrating the betrothal——"

Crack went the whip into the horses! Stepan frowned, and bit his lips until it was a wonder they didn't bleed. "Hold yourself together, mister, you're drunk!"

The wagon rumbled into Hordubal's yard. Juraj let Stepan go, and suddenly became silent and serious.

"Walk the horses round," he commanded, "they're covered with sweat."

XIX

AND Polana didn't know what to think of Juraj. He wanted to drag Stepan to the inn. What, he said, you're not a workman any longer, you're like our son. And instead of crawling behind the barn he walked about the village, stopped, and began to chat with the old women: "I've betrothed Hafia," he said. Well, she's only a child yet, but she got to like Stepan when she hadn't her father at home, and Stepan, neighbour, Hafia is as dear to him as a holy picture—eh, it's a pleasure to have such children. And he praised Stepan to heaven; what a good worker he was. He'll make a good farmer, he said. He'll inherit the farm in Rybary from his father. Round the village he had plenty to say, but at home—as if he were tongue-tied, do this and that, Stepan, and nothing else.

Juraj went round the village looking for those he had not spoken to yet, he waved his hand to Fedeleš Geyza, but he avoided Geric. Geric even held his hand out, but Juraj turned away. As long as I live I don't know you: we're not on speaking

terms, I don't want to know what you're thinking about.

The women laughed: queer betrothal. The bridegroom scowled like thunder, and avoided conversation; he was consumed with rage. The bride—at the stream she played with the children, her skirt tucked up to her waist; she hadn't yet learned to feel ashamed. And Hordubal waved his arms about on the village green, he was proud of his future son-in-law. Only Polana—a strange woman, it's true, but she looked dark, she saw that there was something for the people to laugh at, she didn't even put her nose outside the gate. That's how it was, people, and don't think that everything was in order.

Didn't Hordubal notice that Stepan was displeased? Perhaps he did, but he avoided him. He merely gave him orders over his shoulders, what he had to do, and at once made for somewhere else. And Stepan looked after him as if he wanted to bite his head off.

But Manya wouldn't give in any more; he waited for his master, with his teeth clenched so tightly that the muscles twitched beneath his skin. His master was walking across the yard. "You ought to drive down, Stepan," and already he tried to escape, but

Manya stood in his way. "I want to talk with you about something."

"Well, what is it this time?" said Hordubal evasively. "You'd better look after your own business!"

Stepan was almost ashy with rage—strange, he always used to be so yellow. "What are you saying about me, and about Hafia?" he burst out vehemently.

Hordubal raised his eyebrows. "What am I saying? That I have betrothed my daughter to the farm-worker."

Manya blew himself up with rage. "And why—why you—people laugh at me now, wherever I go. 'When will the christening be, Stepan?' they say, and 'run, Stepan, there's a gander chasing your bride—'"

Hordubal began to rub his neck. "Let them laugh. They'll get tired of it."

"I've got tired, master," said Manya, grinding his teeth. "I—don't want to be a laughing-stock."

Hordubal breathed deeply. "And I don't want to be a laughing-stock either. That's why I betrothed you. So what do you want?"

"I won't," said Manya, grinding his teeth. "I—I

shan't stay here as the bridegroom of a sniffing baby."

Hordubal, with his hand still behind his neck, sized him up with his eyes. "Stop, what did you say? That you won't?"

Manya nearly cried with rage. "I shan't! I don't want to! Do what you like, but I——"

"You won't?"

"I won't."

Hordubal snorted. "You wait here."

Manya swallowed hard, it was a shame for him to be jeered at by the whole village, better run away, or something——

Hordubal came out from the hut, rapidly tearing some paper in his hands into smaller and smaller pieces. He looked at Manya, and threw the bits in his face. "Well, you're not betrothed any longer. You can tell your old man that I've torn the agreement up." His arms flew up, he pointed: "And there's the door, get out!"

Manya took a deep breath, his eyes were as narrow as caraway seeds. "I shan't go from here, mister!"

"You will. And if you ever come again—I've got a gun!"

Stepan grew red. "And what—if I don't go?"

With Hordubal's chest pushing against his Manya retreated. "You look out!" he hissed.

"You won't go?"

"Not till the mistress says so—no!"

Hordubal gave a kind of growl, and suddenly—his knee dug into Manya's belly.

Manya bent double with pain, and then one hefty hand seized him by the collar and the other by the trousers, they raised him, and over the fence into the nettles

"Well," panted Hordubal, "if you couldn't go by the gate, so over the fence." He strolled back, rubbed his neck; there was such an unusual warmth in his neck——

Somewhere behind a fence a neighbour jeered.

XX

POLANA, of course, locked herself in the room, and was as silent as if she were dead.

In the early morning Hordubal harnessed the three-year-old into the wagon, and the heavy gelding, a badly balanced team: the gelding kept his head down, and the stallion carried his high—a strange pair.

“Tell your mother, Hafia, that I’m going to the town; I shan’t be back till evening, if God allows.”

Let the cows moo with hunger, let the horses tap with their hooves, let the sows grunt, and the young pigs squeal; but Polana will stop sulking, they won’t let her, she’s a farmer’s wife after all; she’ll go and look after the animals, can anyone be angry with God’s creatures?

The gelding kept his head down, and the stallion carried his high. Stepan also carries his high—he used to work the three-year-old with the little mare—they go well together, he said. Na, na, why do you bite the gelding, you scoundrel? But Polana will come out when I’m away, she’ll feed the animals,

and cheer up. And see, even at this pace we're getting to the town.

First to the lawyer, and, if you please, sir, I should like to make my last will and testament: I have a wife, she's called Polana; it's right and proper that the wife should inherit what the man leaves.

"And what have you to leave her, Mr. Hordubal: a farm, money, securities?"

Hordubal looked at him suspiciously: Why do you want to know? "Just write: everything that I possess."

"Well, let's write: all my chattels and effects, movable and immovable——"

Hordubal nodded: now, if you please, it says quite clearly, all the chattels and effects, movable and immovable, for her fidelity, and conjugal love.

Now sign here, in the name of the Father, and Son, and the Holy Ghost. Hordubal still hung back. "And then, if you please, would it be possible for me to go to America again?"

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Hordubal; in America they've got too many workers now, they don't want to let any more in——"

"Hm, so. Perhaps there's a mill here in the town?"

"Oh, a factory. There are factories here, but they are closed, they don't work. Bad times, Mr. Hordubal," the solicitor sighed, as if he himself carried the burden of bad times.

Hordubal nodded. What can a man do, men are no longer required. Nobody wants a man like Hordubal; it's a shame for such able hands. But perhaps they want horses, horses who can carry their heads high.

Juraj Hordubal inquired for the commandant of the cavalry. There, they said, in the barracks. And what do you want, uncle, are you looking for your son? No, not my son, but I should like to sell this three-year-old, sir. We don't buy horses here, said the soldier, but he let his hands run over the horse; he touched its legs and withers. A horse like a deer, uncle.

And then an officer came, and shook his head. To sell a horse? A nice animal, and it's been ridden already? He's not had a saddle on yet, you say, only been ridden bare back—by the horseman. And soon about five officers had collected. And well, uncle, can we try the horse? Why not? said Hordubal. But he's very wild, sir. Eh, what, wild; let me have

him, boys, a bridle, and a rug, it would be a marvel if it threw Tony.

Before you could count five, mister officer was sitting on the horse's back. The stallion bucked a bit; reared, and mister officer was on the ground. He fell numbly on his backside, he only laughed, and now, boys, catch the horse on the barrack square. The fat mister commandant laughed till he had to hold his sides. "Well, my man, an excellent horse; but keep it at home for a bit, we shall have to write for a permit before we can buy it---"

Hordubal frowned, and he harnessed the horse into the wagon. "What am I to do, sir? I shall have to sell it either to a gipsy or to the butcher."

The commandant scratched his head. "Listen to me, it's a pity for the stallion. Do you want to get rid of him in any case?"

"Yes, get rid of him," murmured Hordubal
"He doesn't suit me."

"Eh, then leave him here," mister commandant decided, "and we shall give you a receipt to show that the horse is with us. And then later we shall write and say what we'll give for it. Will that suit you?"

"Yes, why not?" said Juraj. "He's a nice horse,

sir, he carries his head high. Eight thousand, they say."

"In that case, take him away," said the commandant quickly.

"Well, say five," said Hordubal hesitating. There was another fat military gentleman, he nodded his head a little. "That would do," the commandant said. "We shall write to you. If you're not satisfied—you can take the horse away. Will that do? And now we'll give you that receipt."

Hordubal drove home, in his pocket he had the receipt with a seal, and the bag with his dollars. The gelding trotted on, hanging its head. The stallion was not there any longer. As if Stepan had gone a second time, now that the three-year-old was gone. It would be better to sell the filly as well and the mare with the foal.—Eh, little gelding, I only tickle your back with the reins, and off you trot. And why not talk to the horse? When a man talks, the horse turns his head, and swishes his tail; it's clear that he understands. Also he nods his head because he's thinking. A long way yet, my boy, but you go well uphill. Na—and don't begin to shy, it's only a little stream over the road. Never mind the fly, I'll drive

it away myself. H! And in a low voice, and slowly, Juraj began to sing.—

Oh, Polana, Polana,
Unlucky Polana,
Let God be with you,
Polana, Polana.

HORDUBAL was strange and restless: early in the morning he disappeared, let God look after the farm, and the devil knows what he was up to. The other day—as far as Tibava; And you, Geletej, do you want a man for your cows, or in the fields? What, a workman, Hordubal, I've got two sons, who is it you're trying to find a job for, cousin? And in the Tatin range, the ranger Stoj lives there; Are there any trees to fell? he inquired. Trees, no my boy, thousands of trees lie rotting in the wood. Is that so, then good-bye. And isn't there a railway being built somewhere, or a road, a quarry being worked? What are you thinking about, uncle, everybody has forgotten us here; who is there to build for?

Well, what am I to do? Sit down somewhere and wait till dusk. Far away the cow-bells are ringing, the herdsman cracks his whip as if he were shooting, somewhere the herdsman's cur is barking. In the fields—someone is singing. What am I to do? Sit and listen. How the flies buzz, one close to my face, you can listen for hours, and it's never silent,

life is always going on; perhaps a beetle chirps, or the squirrel is disturbed, and everywhere the peaceful sound of God's cattle mounts to the heavens.

And in the evening to slouch home. Hafia brings the food—eh, what food, even a dog wouldn't eat it; but I'm not hungry, anyhow. Of course, Polana has no time to get my supper ready. It's night already, the people have gone to bed; and Hordubal walked round with a lantern, doing what jobs he could: cleaning out the cow-shed, putting manure on the heap, fetching water. He worked quietly, so as not to wake anybody, and he pottered about doing what it's a man's job to do. The eleventh hour is striking—every creature praise the L-O-R-D, and Juraj quietly crawled into the cow-shed. Well, cows, well, there won't be quite so much for Polana to do in the morning.

And again as far as Volovo Polje, looking for work. Hi, Harcar, don't you want someone to help you? What you, have you gone mad, or have they let you out of clink? Looking for work now, after the harvest? And what have you got to talk about? thought Hordubal, I've got enough money in my bag to buy half of your farm; you needn't puff

yourself up so much. Slowly Hordubal tramped home, and what to do at home? Oh, only to cross those hills, there's nothing to do in this strange country.

Juraj sat by the edge of the wood above Varvarin's field. There too he could hear the cow-bells, they may have been from the Lehota district. What's that Misa doing up there on the clearing? Below was a brook, and by the brook—a young woman was standing. Juraj screwed his eyes up to see her better. Doesn't she look like Polana? Ah, no, not that, how could Polana be here? From this distance any woman would look like Polana. And from the wood a dark fellow came running. That's not Manya, thought Juraj, how could Stepan come from this side? The dark man reached the young woman and stopped, he stood, and talked. How can they have so much to say? wondered Hordubal. Some girl maybe, and her sweetheart—a stranger, from Lehota, or from Volovo Polje; they meet on the sly, so that the boys at home don't give him a hiding. And those two below stand and talk; well, talk, I'm not looking. The sun is over Mencul, won't it be night soon? And those two stand there below, and talk. And what can I try yet?—perhaps in the salt mines they

might have work for a miner. It's true, the mines are a long way away; but who will mind how far I have to go. Those two stand below and talk. It will be useless to ask in the mines——

No, they're not talking, but there's only one there now, who seems to be rocking about. But no, there are two of them, and they rock about, as if they were fighting. And it's because they're holding each other so tightly that they look as if there were only one staggering there. Hordubal's heart missed a beat. I'll run down there. No, I'll run home, and see if Polana's there. Surely she's at home, where else could she be? Lord, these legs—like lead. Hordubal got up and hastened along the wood, he ran along the footpath, he dashed to the village. Ough, I've got a pricking feeling in my side, as if someone had stuck one of those bodkins into me. Already he was out of breath, and he ran! ran with all his might. Glory be to God, here already is the village! Juraj went at a quick pace. Why does it prick so in my side? God, if I only get there, only a bit further now, there's the gate, I must press with all my might on my ribs so that it doesn't prick so much, and run up to the gate——

Hot and sweating Hordubal leaned against the gate-post, he felt dizzy, he gasped for breath as if he were sobbing. The yard—empty; perhaps Polana is in the room, or somewhere. Suddenly Juraj became deadly indifferent as to where she was, he couldn't get as far as the room, he couldn't get his voice to speak, he breathed in gasps, and he had a job to hold himself up or his legs would have given way beneath him.

The little gate opened, and Polana slipped into the yard, breathless and flushed; she was taken aback when she caught sight of Juraj; she stopped, and said, rather too hastily: "I've only been to see a neighbour, Juraj; at—Herpakova, to look at her baby."

Juraj pulled himself up to his full height, and raised his eyebrows. "I didn't ask, Polana."

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XXII

AND he would have liked to go behind the barn as usual, but he couldn't, the pain stabbed him to the heart. He tried to pretend that he had taken a fancy to the spot, to sit there, on the kerb-stone at the gate, and look at the yard. Polana—all of a sudden she was bustling with work; she fed the hens, she swept the doorstep, everywhere something—“Her-pakova has got a little girl,” she communicated glibly. Eh, Polana, what makes you so keen on talking now?

“Mm,” murmured Juraj casually.

Dusk fell; Polana opened the gate so that the cows could come from the pasture. “You, Juraj,” she began tentatively, “you said that you would buy some more cows——”

“There's no need,” mumbled Hordubal.

Nodding their heads the cows went into the shed, bim bam, bim bam. Juraj rose, God be praised, I can manage already. “Good night, Polana,” he said.

“What—you won't have any supper?”

"No."

Polana stood in his way. "Juraj, I shall make you a bed in the parlour. What will people say if you, the farmer, sleep with the cows!"

"Never mind," said Juraj. "They'll say many things yet."

Polana watched him darkly as he went into the shed. What an old back Juraj has!

Juraj lay down in the straw. He could not feel the pricking in his side any longer, but his heart felt heavy, oppressive. The farm was falling into silence somehow. Hafia prattled uneasily in a subdued voice, as if someone had shouted to her, be quiet, don't shout so loud! As if someone were very ill.

And silence, the farm was asleep. Sighing deeply Hordubal groped his way out of the straw, he lit the lantern, and went to have a look round, to see if there was any job to do. And again it pricked, blast it. The stable ought to be cleaned out, and the horses given fresh bedding, but Juraj only meditated, I should like to, I should; why is it that somehow I don't care to-day? He looked at the hens in the

loft, the pig-sty, the barn, he climbed the ladder to the hay-loft. What if the hay gets hot? Ah, my side hurts. He walked round the yard, and he even went into the orchard. What there? Eh, well, only perhaps there might be somebody. Who could it be there? Well, no one, but you never know. And what about the loft—Polana doesn't sleep there any more, there's maize there: Polana has moved into the room. Hordubal held his breath to keep from groaning, and he climbed up to the loft, he tried to open the door, but he couldn't, he only heard some trickling noise when he shook it. Oh, that's the heap of maize which has slipped down and blocked the door. There's nobody there either. And who could be there? What a silly!

Hordubal stood in the yard like a black pillar, and uneasily scratched his neck. And after all, what am I doing, he wondered, what am I chasing round here for? Manya has lived here for so many years; well, I didn't watch, I didn't run round the yard with a lantern; why do it now? Somehow he felt dull and indifferent. If I were lying in the shed, and heard some steps—should I get up? No, I shouldn't. Should I shout: Who's there? I shouldn't. I should

only hold my breath. Ah, Lord, have I to watch grown-up people? Well, I did once, it's true, and I made as if I had some job to do in the dark. After all, can you watch and keep somebody's heart? Stupid, you are stupid! Well, what—let Manya come back—what does it matter? It's all the same, everything is all the same. Nothing hurts now. When the house is burnt down the roof doesn't leak. At Herpaks' the child began to cry. So you see, perhaps it is true that Polana went to have a look at the baby. Why not? women—like mad with children. That must be Herpakova feeding her child. Do you remember, Polana, how you fed Hafia? Only just moved your shoulder, and your breast slipped into your bodice—it's eleven years ago now. And you—to America—you silly, silly—

Hordubal blinked at the stars. Lord, how many they are—how many more have come through since then! In those days there weren't so many that you almost felt frightened of them. It's all the same. As if everything was slipping away from you, one thing after another. America was, coming home was. Geric was, Fedele, Manya—how much it was; and now there's nothing left. All the same.

Well, praise be to God, it makes it easier for a man.

Tu-tu-tu the night watchman chanted in the distance—and so many stars that you shivered.

Good night, good night, Polana, good night!

XXIII

EARLY in the morning before anyone was awake Juraj had left the village behind him, and made for the hills. To Misa. And what was he going to do there? Oh, only talk with him. It's still misty, you can't see the hills. Juraj shivered a bit; but that pricking feeling was no longer in his side; he only found it a bit difficult to get his breath, perhaps it was the mist. He climbed up to the field that used to be Hordubal's, and he had to stop to catch his breath; Pjosa has got it ploughed already—all stone, they say, and see, even to Pjosa the field is worth the trouble. Hordubal sighed deeply, and tramped upwards into the hills. The mist lifted and rolled away over the forest. Only a bit longer, and it will be autumn.

Hordubal climbed, keeping his hand pressed to his side: Well, it pricks a bit, but it's all the same now, up or down. And this isn't mist, it's a bank of clouds; you can tell by the smell how it's soaking with water. Mind your head or you'll knock into it. And now it's rolled away over the hill, and now again you're in it, and you can't see three yards in front of you, you

just keep on going, forcing your way through a thick fog, and you don't know where you are. And Hordubal gasped as he climbed slowly and laboriously into the clouds.

A cold drizzle began to fall. Above on the clearing Misa threw a sack over his head, and cracking his whip, hazza ho, he was driving the cattle to the hut. You couldn't make out if it was an animal, bush, or boulder; but Cuvaj was a clever cut, he ran round the herd, and kept the cattle moving, but only the sound of the bells could be heard in the mist.

Misa sat at the entrance to the hut and gazed into the mist, the clouds opened for a moment, and you could see the cattle bunched together; and then again everything was enveloped in mist, and only the rain pattered. What time can it be? surely nearly midday. And then Cuvaj sprang up, he snuffed in the mist, and growled faintly.

Out of the mist the shadow of a man appeared. "Are you there, Misa?" cried a hoarse voice.

"I am."

"Thank God!"

It was Hordubal, drenched to the skin, and with

his teeth chattering; from his hat water ran in a stream as if from a gutter.

"What brings you here in the rain?" inquired Misa, rather vexed.

"In the morning . . . it wasn't raining . . ." gasped Juraj. "It was such a clear night . . . and it's good that it rains, we need it."

Misa blinked his eyes thoughtfully. "Wait a bit, I'll make a fire."

Hordubal sat on the hay, and gazed into the little fire; the wood crackled and smoked, Misa put a sack on his back, and a feeling of warmth spread over Juraj's body. Ugh, why it's hot, as hot as it was down there in the mine. Juraj's teeth chattered, and he patted Cuvaj's wet coat, who stank at his side. Oh, well, I smell myself like a drenched dog. "Misa," chattered Juraj, "and what's that hut for in the wood?"

Misa boiled water in the little kettle, and threw some herbs into it. "I know, you don't feel well," he growled. "And what are you doing running about in the rain, you doodle?"

"There was a shaft in the mine . . ." said Juraj hurriedly, "where water was always dripping, always.

Tic-tic-tic, like a clock ticks. And—do you know, Herpakova has had a baby, Polana went to have a look—And there's no job anywhere, Misa, men aren't wanted any longer, they say."

"And yet new ones are born," murmured Misa.

"Must be born!" prattled Juraj. "That's because women are—You aren't married, you don't know anything, you don't know anything—What have you to talk about, if you haven't got a wife? Eh, my lad, there are lots of things to think about. For instance, that they put down: for her fidelity and conjugal love. Otherwise God knows what people would say. And it is a pity that they robbed me of three thousand dollars; she could have been like a lady, eh? What do you say, Misa?"

"Well, that's true," mumbled Misa, blowing into the fire.

"So you see, and then they say I'm a fool. They envy me because I've got a wife who carries her head high like a thoroughbred. People are like that: they want to do you down. And instead, she only went to a neighbour's to look at the baby. All vile gossip, Misa. Tell them that I saw her myself coming from the neighbour's house."

Misa nodded his head thoughtfully. "I'll tell them, I'll tell them everything."

Juraj sighed. "That's why I came to see you, you know. You haven't got a wife, you've got nothing to be spiteful about. They—they wouldn't believe me; but you'll tell them, Misa. It's clear, she had to have a workman while the master was away; but she locked herself in the loft, a latch as big as a thunderbolt; I've seen it myself. And that Geric has got something to say! Eight years, he says, and so. Tell me, who knows her better—Geric or I? She only just moved her shoulder, and her breast slipped into her bodice. And that fellow down there, the one at the stream, he was a chap from Lehota, I saw him, he came from Lehota. And people—gossip at once."

Misa shook his head. "Now, drink this, it's good for you."

Juraj sipped the steaming beverage, and gazed into the fire. "You've got a nice job here, Misa. And tell them, they've got faith in you, you're a knowing one, they say—that she was a good and faithful wife——" The smoke made his eyes smart, and tears stood in his eyes; his nose seemed to stick

out sharply. "It's only me, only me, who knows what she's like. Eh, Misa. I'd go to America like a shot, and earn more money for her——"

"Drink the whole lot at once," urged Misa. "It will warm you up."

A heavy sweat broke out on Hordubal's forehead, he felt weak, and happy. "I could tell you things about America, Misa," he said. "I've forgotten a lot already, but wait a bit, I shall remember——"

Misa quietly made up the fire; Hordubal breathed deeply, and his teeth chattered in his sleep. Outside the rain had stopped, from the spruce-trees behind heavy drops were still falling; and the mist kept on rolling. At times a cow gave a moo, and Cuvaj went to look if the herd was all right.

Misa felt something at his back, it was Hordubal's eyes, for a while Juraj had not been asleep, and he was looking round with sunken eyes.

"Misa," he said hoarsely, "can a man take his own life?"

"What?"

"I asked if a man could take his own life?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"To get away from his thoughts. They're thoughts,

Misa, which have nothing to do with you. You think . . . let's suppose . . . that she lied, that she wasn't with the neighbour . . ." Juraj screwed his mouth up. "Misa," he groaned, "how can I get rid of them?"

Misa blinked his eyes. "Eh, it's very difficult. Think it out to the end."

"And what if at the end there's . . . only the end? Can a man put an end to himself?"

"There's no need," said Misa slowly. "Why? Even then you'll die."

"And—soon?"

"If you want to know—soon."

Misa rose and went out of the hut. "And sleep now," he said, halting at the door, and then he vanished—as if into the clouds.

Hordubal tried to get up. Praise to God, I'm a bit better already, but my head is somehow dizzy, and my body so queer, limp as if it were made of rags.

He staggered out, into the mist; he could not see, only hear the ringing of the cow-bells, a thousand cattle grazing in the clouds, and bim bam with the bells. Juraj walked and walked, he really didn't know where. But I must go home, he thought, and

so he had to go forwards. But he didn't know whether he was going uphill or down; perhaps down, because—he felt as if he were falling; perhaps always—upwards, because he went with difficulty, and breathed heavily. Eh, it's all the same, only home. And Juraj Hordubal plunged into the clouds.

XXIV

It was Hafia who found him in the cow-shed. The cows were uneasy, and Polana sent her: "Go, have a look." He was lying on the straw and there was a rattling in his throat.

And he didn't mind any longer when Polana led him into the parlour, he only tried to raise his eyebrows. She took his clothes off, and put him to bed.

"Do you want anything?"

"No," he chattered, and went to sleep again; he dreamed of something, and they disturbed him—what was it? But Geric was not in America, they mixed everything up, now start again right at the very beginning. If only something didn't weigh so heavily on my chest, it must be that dog, Cuvaj, right on my chest he lies, and sleeps. Juraj passed his feverish hand over his hairy chest. Just sleep, you hairy one, and how your little heart beats! Ah, you beggar, but you are heavy!

He slept for a time, and when he opened his eyes

Polana was standing in the door, and looking inquiringly. "How are you?"

"Better, my dear." He was afraid to talk, for things might go lost and change again into his hovel in Johnstown. But this is—like home: the painted cupboard, the oak table, oak chairs—Hordubal's heart throbbed: but I've come home at last! Lord, what a long journey, a fortnight on the lower deck and in the train—you feel quite broken down. But I mustn't move, or it will disappear again; better close my eyes, and just realize that it's here—

And then it all got mixed up again: the miners in Johnstown—Harcar—they fight Hordubal; Juraj flies through the mine, dodges about, catches hold of the ladder, and struggles upwards; a cage crashes down from above, it will smash his head, it certainly will—and Hordubal woke to his own groaning. Better not sleep, it's better here, and with staring eyes Juraj clutched the peaceful furniture. It's better here. Hordubal made signs with his finger in the air, and told Misa about America. Old boy, the hardest job for me—only, hello, Hordubal, and off I went. Once a shaft fell in, even the breakdown gang wouldn't

go there. Twenty dollars I got then, the foreman himself shook my hand—like this, Misa, like this. And Hordubal descended in the cage, always down; a fat Jewess sat there, and an old man, and they looked severely at Hordubal. A hundred and eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three, Juraj counted and shouted: stop, that's enough, it doesn't go any lower, it's the bottom of the pit. But the cage kept going down, all the time, it got warmer, he couldn't get his breath, these devils take you down to hell. It seemed to Juraj as if he would suffocate, and he woke.

Dawn came; Polana stood at the door looking intently.

"It's better already," murmured Hordubal, and his eyes glowed. "Don't be angry, Polana, I shall get up soon."

"Just keep lying," said Polana, drawing nearer. "Have you got any pain?"

"No, I haven't. In America I had it as well—flu, the doctor said. And in two days—like a horse. I shall get up to-morrow, my dear. I make a mess here, don't I?"

"Do you want anything?"

Hordubal shook his head. "I'm quite well. Only—only water in a bucket, but I could do it myself—"

"I'll bring it straight away." And she went.

Hordubal heaped the pillows behind his back, and put his shirt straight over his chest. So that Polana doesn't see me so undressed, he thought. And if I could wash and shave! But Polana will come, she'll be here directly. Perhaps she'll sit down on the bed while I drink. Juraj moved to make room, so that she could sit down, and he waited. Perhaps she's forgotten, he thought, she's got plenty to do, poor girl—if only Stepan would come back! I'll tell her when she comes: "And what, Polana, if Manya came back?"

Hafia came through the door, carrying a glass of water; she carried it so carefully that her tongue was sticking out.

"You are good, Hafia," sighed Hordubal. "And say, is uncle Stepan here?"

"No."

"And what is mammy doing?"

"She's standing in the yard."

Hordubal no longer knew what to say, he even

forgot to drink: "Well go," he muttered, and with a jump Hafia was out of the door.

Juraj lay silently listening. In the stable the horses' hooves clattered. Will Polana give them water? No, she's feeding the sows, I can hear their contented grunting. How many steps a woman like that must make, he wondered. Stepan ought to come back; I shall drive to Rybary, and I shall say to him: What, you sluggard, get a move on with the horses, Polana can't manage all the work. I shall go perhaps in the afternoon, thought Juraj, and then a veil spread before his eyes, and everything vanished.

Hafia peeped through the door, she changed from one foot to the other, and stole away again. "He's asleep," she whispered to her mother in the yard. Polana said nothing, her thoughts were on something else.

Towards midday, Hafia again stole on tiptoes into the parlour. Hordubal was lying with his arms behind his head, and looking up to the ceiling.

"Mammy wants to know if you want anything?" she recited.

"I think, Polana," said Juraj, "that Stepan ought to come back."

The girl did not understand and opened her mouth: "And how are you?" she says.

"All right, thank you."

Hafia ran out. "He's all right, he says," she announced to Polana.

"Quite all right?"

"Hm," murmured the girl.

And then the afternoon silence fell. Hafia did not know what to do. You must stay at home, Polana said, in case your father wants something. Hafia played in front of the house with her doll, which Stepan had cut out for her. "You mustn't go away," she said to the doll. "Master is lying down, you must watch the yard. And don't cry, or I shall spank you."

Hafia went on tiptoes to peep into the parlour. Her father was sitting on the bed, nodding his head.

"What is mammy doing, Hafia?"

"She's gone somewhere."

Hordubal nodded. "Tell her that Stepan must come back. And Stepan can get that stallion back. Would you like to have some little rabbits?"

“I should.”

“I shall make you a rabbit hutch, one like the miner Jensen had. Eh, Polana, in America there are things—I shall do everything.” He nodded his head “Wait, I shall take you up on the clearing, there’s a strange hut—even Misa doesn’t know what it is. Go, go tell mammy that Stepan will come back.”

Hordubal felt satisfied, he lay down, and closed his eyes. It’s as dark here as it is in the mine. Bang, bang, with the hammer at the rock. And Stepan grins, all stone, he says. Yes, but you don’t know, you greenhorn, what work is. A fellow is known by what he does. And what’s the wood like, my sweet, you’ve got in the yard. All straight logs. And I—I used to chop up old stumps. That’s a job for a man, to chop up stumps, or dig out stones from the ground. Hordubal felt satisfied. I’ve done a lot, Polana, ah, God, a lot. It’s all right, it is as it ought to be. And Juraj, with his hands crossed, fell asleep.

He woke in the dusk, because the darkness felt oppressive. “Hafia,” he shouted, “Hafia, where’s Polana?” There was no answer, only from the

distance came the sound of the cow-bells, the herds coming from pasture. Hordubal sprang up from the bed, and pulled on his trousers; I must open the gate for the cows. I feel all dizzy, that's from lying down. He groped his way out, into the yard, and opened the gate wide. He felt queer, he gasped for breath. But praise be to God, I'm already up and out. The sound of the cow-bells drew nearer, it flowed like a river: everything ringing, as if with cow-bells, and the tinkling of the calves. Juraj felt like kneeling down; never before had he heard such great and glorious ringing. Nodding their heads, looking tremendous, two cows came into the yard, with full and gleaming udders. Juraj leaned against the gate, and he felt as well, as peaceful, as if he were praying.

Polana ran through the gate, hasty, breathless. "You've got up already?" she burst out. "And where's Hafia?"

"Well, up," murmured Juraj apologetically. "I'm all right now."

"Go, go and lie down again," commanded Polana. "In the morning—you'll be quite all right."

"As you like, my sweet, as you like," said Juraj

obediently and kindly. "I should be too much in the way here." He closed the gate, latched it, and slowly went into the parlour.

When they took him his supper, he was asleep.

"JURAJ HORDUBAL has been murdered!"

Geric, the mayor, hastily pulled on his coat. "Run, boy, for the police," he commanded quickly. "Tell them to go to Hordubal's."

In Hordubal's yard Polana was running about, wringing her hands. "Oh, Lord, Lord," she cried, "Who's done it! They've killed him, they've killed him!"

Hafia looked on from a corner, the neighbours stared over the fence, a body of men forced its way through the small gate. The mayor went straight up to Polana, and put his hand on her shoulder. "Stop that. And what's happened to him? Where's the wound?"

Polana trembled: "No—no—I don't know, I haven't been there, I couldn't——"

The mayor gave her a shrewd glance. She was pale and rigid, she only forced herself to run about and lament. "And who saw him?"

Polana pressed her lips tightly together. But then the police came and shut the small gate in front of

the peoples' noses. It was the fat Gelnaj with his coat unbuttoned, and without a rifle, and with him was the new man, Biegl, who sparkled with freshness and zeal.

"Where is he?" inquired Gelnaj in a subdued voice. Polana pointed to the parlour and began to wail.

The American Hordubal was lying on the bed as if he were asleep. Gelnaj took his helmet off to the dead, but not to make it appear so, he wiped away the sweat. Geric hung about gloomily by the door. But Biegl went up to the dead man, and leaned over the bed. "Look here on his chest," he said. "A drop of blood. It looks as if they'd stabbed him with something."

"A family affair," murmured the mayor. Gelnaj turned slowly. "What do you mean by that, Geric?"

The mayor shook his head. "Nothing." Poor Juraj, he thought to himself.

Gelnaj scratched behind his ear. "Look, Charley, a broken window." But Charley Biegl pulled away the shirt on the dead man's chest, and looked beneath. "I wonder," he said slowly. "It wasn't a knife, and hardly any blood——"

"That window, Biegl," repeated Gelnaj. "That's something for you."

Biegl turned towards the window. It was shut, only one pane was broken. "Ah, look here," he said with interest. "Well, this way—but nobody could crawl through this hole, Gelnaj. And, here on the glass are scratches made by a diamond, but on the inside! That's queer!"

Geric tiptoed up to the bed. Eh, poor devil, how your nose sticks out! And your eyes are closed as if you were asleep—

Biegl cautiously opened the window and looked out. "That's as one would expect," he announced with satisfaction. "The bits are outside, Gelnaj."

Gelnaj snorted. "So you think, mayor," he said with deliberation, "it's a family affair, what? And I haven't seen Stepan Manya here."

"He may be at home, in Rybary," the mayor suggested uncertainly.

Biegl nosed round everywhere. "Nothing's been disturbed, nothing broken—"

"I don't like it, Charley," said Gelnaj.

Biegl showed his teeth. "Very stupid, isn't it?"

But wait, it will all work out nicely. I like straightforward cases, Gelnaj."

Gelnaj rolled out into the yard, fat and respectable. "Come here, Hordubalova. Who was in the house last night?"

"Only me—and Hafia here, my daughter."

"Where did you sleep?"

"In the room, with Hafia."

"This door leading into the yard was locked, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was locked."

"And in the morning it was still locked? Who opened it?"

"I did—when it got light."

"And who found the corpse first?"

Polana kept her lips closed tightly, and gave no answer.

"Where is your workman?" inquired Biegl suddenly.

"At home, in Rybary."

"How do you know that?"

"Well—I only think—"

"I'm not asking you what you think. How do you know that he's in Rybary?"

“—I don’t.”

“When was he here last?”

“Ten days ago. He got the sack.”

“When did you see him last?”

“Ten days ago.”

“You’re lying,” said Biegl, making a random shot.

“You were with him yesterday. We know that.”

“It’s not true,” cried Polana in terror.

“Confess, Hordubalova,” Gelnaj advised her.

“No—yes. He saw me yesterday——”

“Where?” demanded Biegl.

“Out there.”

“Where, out there?”

Polana glanced quickly here and there. “Behind the village.”

“What were you doing there? What? Answer me quick!”

Polana said nothing.

“You had an appointment with him, hadn’t you?”

Gelnaj began again.

“No, God is my witness! We met by accident——”

“Where?” demanded Biegl again.

Polana turned her hunted eyes to Gelnaj. “We met by accident. He only asked me when he could come

for his things. He has some clothes still here, there in the stable."

"Aha, your husband sacked him on the spot, didn't he? Will you please tell me why?"

"They had a quarrel."

"And when was he to have come for his things?"

"To-day—this morning."

"And did he?"

"No, he didn't."

"Because he came last night," interrupted Biegl.

"No, he hasn't been here! He was at home!"

"How do you know that?"

Polana bit her lip. "I don't."

"Come, *Hordubalova*," said Biegl sharply. "When you see the victim you'll tell us some more."

Polana staggered.

"Let her be," growled Genic Vasil Vasilov. "She's going to have a baby."

II

GELNAJ sat in the yard, and let Biegl pry round all the farm buildings. He sniffed and sniffed, and his eyes shone with zeal. He poked about in the stables and cow-shed, he went round everything, and then he began to search about in the loft; he grew livelier, he enjoyed it so much. What a job! thought Gelnaj to himself; gipsies are enough for me, and to keep order—— Well, let Charley enjoy himself.

From the parlour the doctor emerged, and went to wash his hands at the pump. Biegl was already on the spot, and inquired impatiently: “Well, what, what was it?”

“That will come out at the post mortem,” replied the doctor. “But I should say that it was probably a nail, or something. Only two, three drops of blood—queer.”

Polana brought him a towel.

“Thank you, marm. And tell me, was your husband ill in any way?”

“He was in bed yesterday, he had some kind of fever.”

"Aha. And you're going to have a baby, aren't you?"

Polana blushed. "Not till spring, sir."

"It won't be in the spring, mother. Some time early in the new year."

As Polana went away Biegl winked with pleasure. "So then we have a motive, Gelnaj. Hordubal only came back from America in July."

Gelnaj snorted. "Hordubalova thinks that it was somebody from outside. Some time ago her husband had a fight in the pub, she says, and badly mauled Fedeleš Gejza. He knocked him on the head. Gejza is a ruffian. It may be vengeance, she says. There's another nice motive for you there, Charley."

The doctor also glanced after Polana, and said, absent-mindedly: "It's a pity that you will lock her up, and I like maternity cases. I get nothing to do with births here, women have children like cats: With this woman it's likely to be a more difficult delivery."

"Why?"

"Old and thin. About forty, isn't she?"

"Oh, no," said Gelnaj. "Hardly thirty. And so Hordubal was ill? How can you tell then when a man's dead?"

"A medical secret, Gelnaj, but I'll tell you. Under the bed there was a full pot."

"I hadn't noticed that," said Biegl enviously.

"So good-bye, gentlemen," said the doctor, swaying as he marched away on his stumpy legs. "And you'll let me know about the inquest, won't you?"

"I shall have another look round the house yet," mumbled Biegl, "and then we could go to Rybary."

"And what do you keep on looking for, Charley? Another motive?"

"Clues," said Biegl drily. "And the instrument."

"Aha. I wish you well."

Gelnaj strolled to the fence, and began a conversation with a neighbour; he teased her until she gave him a slap with her dish-cloth and a bunch of flowers. In a corner near the shed Hafia was crouching, terrified. Gelnaj made faces at her, and grinned so fiercely that she was frightened at first, and then began to mimic him. When after a long time Biegl came out of the barn, Hafia was sitting on Gelnaj's knee, telling him that she was going to have a rabbit-hutch.

"I've not found anything more," said Biegl

irritably. "But I shall come back here again. It would be strange if I—— Did you tell Geric to get a cart for us to go to Rybary?"

"It's waiting already," said Gelnaj, dismissing Hafia with a pat on her seat.

"Well, what, Gelnaj, what do you think of it?"

"I'll tell you what, Biegl," growled Gelnaj thoughtfully. "I shan't think anything about it at all. After twenty-five years I've had enough of it. I don't like it."

"Well, a murder isn't a trivial thing," said Biegl expertly.

"Oh, not that so much, Charley," said Gelnaj, shaking his head. "Only, you know, a murder in a village mustn't be taken like that. You're a townee, you don't see the point. If it were robbery with violence, I should damned well nose about like you. But a murder in the family—And I'll tell you, I'm not surprised that they killed Hordubal."

"Why?"

"—He was unlucky by nature. He had it written on his face, my boy."

Biegl grinned. "The devil had it written on his face. A young farm hand slept in the house, that's

the whole case. Gelnaj, man, it's such a simple case——”

“Oh, no, cases in a family are never simple,” growled Gelnaj. “But you'll see, Charley. To murder for money, that's simple, it can be done in two ticks; but think, for days and weeks to have it inside you, for days and nights to brood on it—in that case, Biegl, it's as if you poked your nose into hell. It's clear to you because you're new to the place; but I knew them all, Charley, all three. But what's the good of talking? let's go to Rybary.”

III

"Is Stepan at home?"

"No, he's gone to the town."

Biegl pushed Michal Manya out of his way, and rushed into the house. Gelnaj in the meantime began to talk to old Manya and Michal about the weather, hares, and that the sewage was running out on to the road.

Biegl returned, followed by Stepan, pale and rebellious, with bits of hay sticking to his clothes.

"So why did you say that he wasn't at home?" demanded Biegl of Michal.

"In the morning he said that he was going to the town," mumbled Michal. "Is it my job to watch him?"

"And all the time he was hiding in the hay! What were you hiding there for, you?"

"I wasn't," scowled Stepan. "Why should I? I was asleep."

"Perhaps that's because you didn't sleep enough last night, eh?"

"Yes, I did. Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, why were you asleep when we came?"

"Because I've got nothing to do here. I had enough to do when I was at work."

"He worked yesterday, if you please; he was ploughing all day," put in old Manya quickly.

"I didn't ask you," snapped Biegl. "Get off into the house, and Michal as well."

"Oh ah," sighed Gelnaj. "And what have you got to say, Stepan, to what's happened to Hordubal?"

"I haven't done anything to him," burst out Stepan.

"So you already knew that someone had killed him?" began Biegl victoriously. "And who told you about it?"

"—Nobody. But when you see policemen—you can guess that something's wrong with Hordubal."

"And why with Hordubal?"

"Because—because we had a quarrel," said Stepan. clenching his teeth and fists. "He threw me out, the dog!"

Biegl was rather disconcerted. "Take care, Manya. So you admit that you parted with Hordubal in anger?"

Stepan was vexed and showed his teeth. "Everybody knows that, don't they?"

"And did you want to revenge yourself on him?"

Stepan snorted. "If I had met him—I don't know what I should have done."

Biegl stood thinking for a short time: Stepan wasn't going to give in easily.

"Where were you last night?" he asked pointedly.

"I was at home, here, I was asleep."

"That remains to be seen. Is there anyone who can prove it?"

"Yes. Michal—Dula—our old man. Ask them."

"It's not your business to give me advice," rapped out Biegl. "You talked with Hordubalova yesterday afternoon. What about?"

"I didn't talk with her," replied Stepan harshly and deliberately. "I didn't see her at all."

"You're lying! She told me herself that she had an appointment with you—that you asked her when you ought to come for your things——"

"I haven't seen her for ten days," insisted Stepan. "Since I stopped work, I haven't been in Kriva, and I haven't seen her."

"Be careful," stormed Biegl. "I'll teach you to

talk sense! Get a move on, and show me where you slept last night."

Stepan shrugged his shoulders, and led Biegl into the house. Gelnaj knocked at the window: "Hi, you old fellow, come here!"

Old Manya shuffled out, and blinked his eyes suspiciously. "Beg your pardon, what's happened?"

Gelnaj waved his hand. "Someone had a go at Hordubal last night, he got a whack on the head. Listen, my friend, didn't Stepan do it?"

The old man shook his head. "Oh, not that, I tell you, Stepan couldn't have done that. He was at home, he was asleep. Hi, Michal, come here! Tell us where Stepan was last night."

Michal thought for a bit, and then said, slowly: "Well, where could he be? He was asleep upstairs with Dula and me."

"I see," nodded Gelnaj, "I knew it straight away. And Hordubal isn't popular in the village. You know, a rich American, and he doesn't even entertain his neighbours."

Old Manya lifted his arms. "I say, rich! Under his shirt he carries a bag with nothing but dollars——"

"Have you seen them?"

"Yes, I have, for he came here to buy our farm, and he showed me the money. More than seven hundred dollars, I tell you. Unpopular in the village, that may be; a proud man has no friends."

Gelnaj nodded thoughtfully. "And what have you got here, Manya, this splintered door?"

"That's done by sticking the basket needle into it. It's there the whole year round."

"Show me what it looks like," asked Gelnaj, becoming interested. "I didn't know that baskets were made with a needle."

"Oh, the stems are planted with the needle—like this," said Manya, showing him with his finger. "It was still here yesterday," he grumbled. "Don't you know where it's gone, Michal?"

"Don't worry," mutmured Gelnaj indifferently. "When I'm going past some time, I'll look in. But you oughtn't to let that sewage, Manya, run out on to the road. It's not your road."

"When we begin to manure the field, the heap will be carted away—."

"You ought to have a proper cistern, one made of concrete. You need some money in the farm, eh?"

"Oh, that, yes, we do," simpered the old man. "To build a new barn—but Michal here is a neer-do-well. Stepan has more sense for farming. Stepan, he would make a farmer."

Dula returned from the fields, bringing on the wagon a small cock of hay, but he drove along in great style.

"Come here, boy," shouted Gelnaj in a fatherly manner, "I only want to get things straightened out. Where was Stepan last night?"

Dula opened his mouth, and looked questioningly at his father and at Michal; no one made the slightest sign. "He was here," mumbled Dula. "With me and Michal, he slept in the loft."

"Well, you've said it," said Gelnaj approvingly. "And what, shall you join the cavalry?"

The youngster's teeth glistened. "Of course I shall."

From the house Biegl emerged, silent and irritated. "Come here, Gelnaj. I've given Stepan several on the jaw; and now I've locked him in the parlour."

"You oughtn't to have done that," said Gelnaj. "Infringement of personal freedom, and so on."

Biegl grinned disrespectfully. "What do I care?"

The worst is that I haven't found anything. And what about you?"

"Alibi as plain as a pikestaff, Charley. The whole night long he slept in the hay like a good boy."

"They're telling lies," burst out Biegl impatiently.

"Of course. It's in their blood, my friend."

"But at the court they'll change their tune," promised Biegl.

"And that's because you don't know them. They'll either refuse to give evidence or they'll all perjure themselves wholesale. In a village, Charley, it's like a national custom."

"Well, what am I to do?" frowned Biegl. "What do you think, Gelnaj, ought we to arrest Stepan now? You can bet your life that he did it!"

Gelnaj nodded. "I know. Only—look out, Biegl," he began to say, but did not finish; for just then there was a slight clatter, and Biegl roared: "Stop him!" and off he dashed round the corner of the building. Gelnaj slowly followed. There were two men on the ground, but Biegl was on top. "I'll hold him for you, Charley," offered Gelnaj.

Biegl got up, and by twisting Stepan's arm he made him get up too.

"Up you get," he puffed breathlessly. "I'll give you something for trying to run away."

Stepan hissed through his teeth, and his face was screwed up with pain. "Let go," he growled. "I—I only wanted to go to Kriva—to get my things——"

Dula forced his way between the two policemen. "Let him go," he shouted, "let him go, or——"

Gelnaj put his hand on his shoulder. "Slowly, boy. And you, Michal, don't you try to interfere. Stepan Manya, I arrest you in the name of Law. And now come quietly, you camel!"

They drove Stepan Manya to the town. He didn't ride behind the little stallion with his head up, and yet people stopped and looked back. On each side sat a policeman with a rifle between his knees; Stepan was between them; his little hat was not stuck at the back of his head, and he didn't look round at the plain. There—the river, and here horses grazing, a swamp glistened between the rushes; but Stepan only gazed at the tawny back of some horseman——

Gelnaj unbuttoned his uniform, and began to talk. He talked familiarly with Stepan, but said not a word about Hordubal; only about farming, about his home at Rybary, about horses—Stepan at first would

hardly open his mouth, but later his tongue became loose. Yes, that little stallion; the master got a bad price for him, who knows who he sold him to, and for how much; he could have had eight thousand for him, he ought to go to a stud farm, but first put that black filly to him—eh, sir, I should like to see what would come of it! Manya's eyes lit up. And he sold a horse like that! It's a sin. He ought to have sold the gelding, or the mare with the foal—but that little stallion— Stepan became so moved that he began to foam at the corners of his mouth; and Biegl was upset and thought that one ought not to talk with the culprit, except in an official capacity.

"Eh, sir," said Stepan, almost to himself, "if that stallion were in the shafts, I'd take the reins myself—it would be a ride!"

IV

"Look here, Gelnaj," explained Biegl in the evening. "Someone in the house did it; he broke the window from inside to make it look like a burglary. He couldn't get in by the door because it was bolted. So he was either in the house already in the evening——"

"He wasn't," said Gelnaj. "Hafia told me that Uncle Stepan hadn't been with them in the evening."

"Very well. Or someone in the family let him in at night; but then it couldn't have been a stranger. Stepan was there for five years as a worker. The whole village knows that for those five years he had relations with Hordubalova——"

"No, only for four years. The first time they were together in the straw, afterwards the mistress went to him every night in the stable. Hafia told me that, Charley."

"That Hafia of yours seems to know a lot," scoffed Biegl.

"Well," said Gelnaj, "you know, a country child——!"

"Well, go on: Hordubalova is expecting a child—it

is common sense that it's with Stepan, because Hordubal, the American, only came back in July. Hordubalova knew that it would come back on her, Hordubal wanted her for himself——”

Gelnaj shook his head. “It might not be like that, Biegl. He used to sleep in the cow-shed, and she in the loft, or in the room. I know that from the neighbours”

“—But she kept on with the workman.”

“That's just what I don't know,” said Gelnaj thoughtfully. “Hafia thinks not. But during the last few days Polana used to go away, behind the village. The neighbour saw her go off.”

“Man,” exclaimed Biegl in astonishment, “you know as much as an old woman. But I want myself to get a logical picture.”

“Aha. And can't you work it out on your own, Charley?”

“No, I must get it straight in my head by talking about it. That fool Hordubal trusted Stepan so much that he betrothed his little daughter, Hafia, to him. But, tell me, isn't it absolutely medieval—to betroth a child!”

Gelnaj shrugged his shoulders.

"But then it somehow dawned on him that his wife was leading him a pretty dance, and he threw Stepan out of the house."

Gelnaj snorted with disapproval. "And what are you trying to tell me, Biegl? First Stepan went away from the Hordubals, and only afterwards did he betroth Hafia to him. Ask the wives in the village."

"That doesn't agree with my idea," said Biegl, growing confused. "Well, man, how does it really hang together?"

"I don't know, Charley, I have no—what do you call it? logical picture. It's a family affair, and not one of those clear-cut cases. Not at all, it can't be clear. You've got no family, Biegl, that's it."

"But, Gelnaj, after all, it's as easy as A B C: Polana wanted to get rid of her husband: Stepan—would like to marry and take the farm. Those two came to an understanding, everything ready. Yesterday Polana ran for Stepan—"

Gelnaj shook his head. "Wrong again. Hafia told me that Hordubal sent her himself yesterday to fetch Stepan back. And it's not my affair! Biegl, but hadn't the victim a bag under his shirt with money in it?"

Biegl was taken aback. "What, a bag? He hadn't got anything."

"So you see," said Gelnaj. "And they say that he had more than seven hundred dollars. Have a look for those dollars, Charley."

"You think—murder and robbery?"

"I don't think anything, but the money's gone. Old Manya saw it once with Hordubal. Manya wanted to build a new barn——"

Biegl whistled quietly. "Ah, so! Then the real motive would be money!"

"Might be," nodded Gelnaj. "It usually is. Or say vengeance. Biegl—there you have another motive which might do. Hordubal threw Stepan over the fence into the nettles. For that, Charley, in a village, the usual thing is a clasp-knife. You can choose which motive you like."

"Why do you tell me that?" frowned Biegl.

"Well, so that you can make a logical picture for yourself," said Gelnaj, innocently. "And perhaps Manya killed him because of that stallion."

"That's nonsense!"

"Just so. In a family they murder for nonsense, my dear Biegl."

Biegl shut up sulkily.

“Don’t get angry, Charley,” growled Gelnaj. “Instead I’ll tell you how Hordubal was murdered. With a bodkin for making baskets.”

“How do you know that?”

“It was lost yesterday at Manya’s farm. You can look for it, Biegl.”

“What does it look like?”

“I don’t know. I think it looks like some kind of a needle, but that’s all I know,” said Gelnaj, carefully cleaning his pipe. “Except that at Manya’s they’re going to cart the manure heap away.”

V

GELNAJ and Biegl were drinking wine and waiting for the doctor to return from the post mortem.

"And where did you find that glass-cutter?"

"At Hordubals', in the room. What have you got to say to that?"

"These peasants are like that," said Gelnaj, very upset. "They hate to throw anything away even if it incriminates them. They think it may come in handy sometime——" he spat expertly. "A stingy lot——"

"Hordubalova said that the glass-cutter had been there for ages, even before her husband went to America. But Farkas, the glazier, says that he can remember Stepan buying it there about a month ago."

Gelnaj whistled. "A month ago! Look here, Biegl, that's strange: that they'd thought of it a month ago. To kill somebody quickly, I could do that myself, but to think over it day by day—And you haven't found those dollars yet?"

"No. In that room I unearthed a flash-lamp. I'm

trying to find out where Stepan bought it. That's another proof, isn't it? There's enough evidence for the woman to be arrested as well. But they say that we ought to find some definite proofs."

Gelnaj fidgeted on his chair. "Charley, since it's you—I know something too. They say that Stepan's brother-in-law, someone called Janos, had let it out that about a week ago Stepan came to him in the field, and said: 'You, Janos, you could have what you like, a pair of oxen, perhaps, and you could choose them yourself at the market—for a small job,' he said, 'just to put Juraj Hordubal out of the way.' "

"That's good," acknowledged Biegl. "And what did Janos do?"

"'Get on with you,' he said to him, 'and have you money for it, Stepan?' 'I haven't,' said Stepan, 'but the mistress has: we've promised each other to get married when Hordubal's gone.' "

"Then we've got them," said Biegl with relief, "and they're both in it."

Gelnaj nodded. But at that moment the doctor appeared, coming from the post mortem, hurrying on his stumpy legs, and looking round with short-sighted eyes.

"Doctor," shouted Gelnaj, "won't you stop for a minute?"

"Ah," said the doctor bluntly. "Well, perhaps. Bring me some brandy. He's already begun to smell, poor chap. Not a pleasant job. Aha," he sighed, putting down his empty glass. "And do you know, gentlemen, that they killed a dead man?"

Biegl's eyes opened wide. "Why, how's that?"

"Very likely he was breathing his last, a comatose state. Nearly dead. Pneumonia in a very advanced stage, the right lung already septic, as yellow as gall. He wouldn't have lived till morning."

"So it wasn't necessary then," said Gelnaj slowly.

"That's true. A dilatation of the aorta—as big as your fist. Even if he hadn't had pneumonia, the slightest excitement would have finished him off, poor chap."

The policemen maintained an uneasy silence. At last Biegl cleared his throat, and inquired: "And what was the cause of death, doctor?"

"Well, murder. He was stabbed in the left chamber of his heart. But because he was at the last gasp there was little loss of blood."

"And what do you think it was done with?"

"I don't know. A nail—or, to put it briefly, with a thin, pointed metal object, about ten centimetres long, round in section—are you satisfied?"

Gelnaj played with his glass with his fat fingers to hide his confusion. "And, doctor—couldn't it be said that he died of pneumonia? See here, when he would have died in any case—why make such a fuss—?"

"That won't do, Gelnaj," burst out Biegl. "It's murder!"

The doctor's glasses glistened. "It would be a pity, sir. An interesting case. You rarely come across a murder with a needle or something similar. I shall put the heart in spirit, and send it"—he began to grin—"to a specialist. So that you can have it as clear as a pikestaff, gentlemen. It's no use, it's murder within the meaning of the law. Oh, God, but how unnecessary!"

"Well, that's that," grumbled Gelnaj. "And this jackass calls it a simple case!"

VI

But the bottle with Hordubal's heart was broken in the post, and the spirit ran out, so that the heart of Juraj Hordubal reached the learned gentleman's study in a very bad state.

"What are they sending me this for?" inquired the angry white-haired gentleman. "And what have they written? That they diagnosed a wound with a sharp instrument. These country doctors!" The professional expert sighed, and looked at Juraj Hordubal's heart from a safe distance. "Write: a stabbing wound is ruled out, the hole is too small—it's a shot through the muscle of the heart from a weapon of small calibre—most probably a Flobert. Take it away!"

"Well, now we've got it," said Gelnaj to Biegl, as he returned from Rybary. "And it says, Charley, that Hordubal wasn't stabbed, but was shot from a Flobert. So there!"

Biegl's hands fell. "And what does the doctor say to that?"

"What can he say? He's furious. You know him,

don't you? And he sticks to his own opinion, he says. Well, then, a Flobert; the bullet hasn't been found, it's true; but what can one do? You must look for someone who has a Flobert."

Biegl threw his helmet into the corner. "I shan't leave it like that, Gelnaj," he threatened. "I shan't let anyone butt in here. Good Lord! I'd nearly finished, it all fits in, and now this! Tell me, can we go to the court—with this? Where shall we find a Flobert, man?"

Gelnaj shrugged his shoulders. "So you see, this is because you wouldn't let poor Hordubal pass to heaven with pneumonia. You deserve it, and so does the doctor."

In a rage Biegl sat down on his chair. "This, Gelnaj, has spoiled all my pleasure. The greatest pleasure I ever had."

"Well, what is it?"

"I've found the dollars. Something over seven hundred, and the bag as well. They were behind the beam in the loft in Rybary."

Gelnaj was surprised, and he took his pipe out of his mouth. "Well, that's something, Charley," he said with appreciation.

"But it took some finding," said Biegl, with satisfaction. "I've added it up: do you know how long I was searching round in Rybary? No less than forty-six hours I didn't leave one little straw untouched. Stepan can stuff himself with his alibi. What do you think, Gelnaj: will it satisfy the jury? The money has been found, the glass-cutter that Stepan bought isn't bad either, then you've discovered contradictions in their statements, and a motive like a traction engine."

"Four motives," suggested Gelnaj.

Biegl shook his head. "Not at all! It was just an ordinary, mean, ugly murder for money. I'll tell you how it happened. Hordubal knew that Manya had relations with his wife, and he was scared of him. That's why he carried his money under his shirt, that's why he betrothed him to Hafia, that's why he threw him out in the end, that's why he locked himself in the cow-shed. Quite a clear case, Gelnaj."

Gelnaj blinked thoughtfully. "And I've always got those horses in my mind. Stepan liked horses. He didn't talk of anything else but them, to buy more land, and breed nothing but horses. There was a piece of land for sale behind Hordubal's meadows.

Perhaps Manya wanted Hordubal to buy it, and he wouldn't, and carried his money under his shirt—I shouldn't wonder, Charley, if it wasn't for that."

"Anyway, it comes to the same thing: for money. It certainly wasn't because of love for Polana."

"Who knows."

"No. Gelnaj, you're an old policeman, and you know the people in the village; but I'm young, and I damned well know something about women. I've had a look at Polana. She's a plain, bony woman—and old, Gelnaj; it's true she's had relations with the farm-hand—I think it must have cost her a heap of money. But for her, Gelnaj, Hordubal wouldn't let himself be killed, for her Stepan wouldn't commit murder. But for money—it's quite clear. Hordubal was a village miser, Polana was after the money so that she could keep her lover, Stepan would do anything for brass—and there you've got it, Gelnaj. In all this there wasn't as much love as that," Biegl snapped his fingers. "A dirty case, man, but quite simple."

"Well, have you got it all together, Biegl?" said old Gelnaj. "Like the public prosecutor. According to you it's so simple——"

Biegl grinned with self-esteem.

"—but according to me, Charley, it would be simpler still if the Lord had taken Juraj Hordubal. Pneumonia, amen. And after a time the widow would marry the farm-hand—a baby would be born—But you don't like that Biegl, it's such a simple story."

"No. I like to find out the truth, Gelnaj. That's a job for a man."

Gelnaj blinked thoughtfully. "And you have a feeling, Charley, that you've found it? The real truth?"

"—I'd like to find that needle yet."

BOOK III

THE State *v.* Stepan Manya, twenty-six, farm worker, single, Reformed Church confession,

And Polana Hordubalova, *née* Durkotova, widow, thirty-one, Greek Orthodox confession,

For the murder of Juraj Hordubal, farmer, of Kriva, and for being an accomplice in the murder of the said Juraj Hordubal respectively.

Accused, stand up. You have heard the charge. Are you guilty or not guilty?

The accused pleaded not guilty. He said that he had not killed Juraj Hordubal; he slept that night at home in Rybary. The money behind the beam—he got from the farmer, as a dowry, he said, if he married Hafia. He had not bought the glass-cutter. He had not had any relations with the other accused. He had nothing further to say.

The accused pleaded not guilty. She did not know anything of the murder until the morning. Questioned as to how she discovered that Juraj Hordubal was dead, she said that she only noticed the broken window. She had not had any relations with the other accused. The farmer himself bought the glass-cutter years ago. The murderer must have gained

entry through the window, because the door into the yard was bolted, all through the night.

Having said that she sat down, deathly pale, not at all attractive, in an advanced stage of pregnancy, because of her pregnancy, the proceedings had to be expedited.

And the process rolled on with the inexorable routine of the judicial machine. Protocols were read and opinions given, notes rustled, the jury put on a pious air and pretended to follow with understanding every word in the official bill. The accused sat as still as a doll, only her eyes wandered restlessly. Stepan Manya from time to time wiped his forehead, and tried to follow what was being read: who knows if there's a hitch in it, who knows what the learned gentlemen will spin out of it: with his head respectfully bowed Manya listened, moving his lips as if he were repeating every word.

The court came to the cross-examination of the witnesses.

Vasil Geric Vasilov, mayor of Knva, was called; a tall, broad-shouldered farmer; slowly and seriously he repeated the words of the oath. He was one of the first to see the corpse. It's true that he said that

it was a family affair. Why? It's only common sense, your honour. And, are you aware, Geric, that Polana Hordubalova had relations with Stepan Manya? He was aware. He spoke to her himself about it before Juraj came back—— And was Hordubal in the habit of treating his wife badly?—He should have beaten her, your honour, declared Vasil Geric Vasilov, to chase the devil out of her. She would not even prepare meals for Juraj.—Perhaps Hordubal complained of his wife?—He did not, he only avoided people; he perished with grief, like a candle.

Polana sat erect, and gazed into the void.

The police sergeant, Gelnaj, gave testimony which agreed with the indictment. He went over the tangible evidence: Yes, this is the window from Hordubals' parlour, here on the inner side it is cut with a diamond. That day it was rainy, there was a puddle outside the window; but inside the parlour there was no trace of mud, and on the window-sill the dust was undisturbed. Could a man crawl through this hole? No; in any case he would have had to get his head through, and that's impossible.

The assistant policeman, Biegl, gave evidence; he stood at attention, and sparkled with zeal. His

answers agreed closely with the indictment. He found the glass-cutter in the cupboard, which was locked; Hordubalova did not want to let him have the key, she said she had lost it. He broke the cupboard open, and found the key at last at the bottom of a bucket of oats. He also found Hordubal's dollars at Rybary. And there's something else, your honour, which I thought I ought to bring, reported Biegl, in a louder voice, and he produced something from his handkerchief. He had found it only yesterday, when the Manyas were carting the manure heap away. It had been thrown into the midden.

Biegl laid on the table before his honour a thin, pointed object, about fifteen centimetres long, with a circular section. What is it?—It's a bodkin for making baskets, which belonged to Manya, and was lost on the day of the murder.—Biegl didn't move an eyelash, but he enjoyed his triumph, and basked in the general interest. For five weeks he had been looking for this miserable needle, and here it is.

Accused, do you recognize this needle?

No, I don't. And Manya sat down, gloomy and sulky.

The doctor gave evidence. He wished to make it

clear that the murder was committed with a thin, pointed object, round in section. If Hordubal had been shot the projectile would have remained in the body, and it was not there; at great length the doctor explained the difference between a wound from a shot and from a stab; and besides, a rifle of such small calibre must have been fired at such a short range that the shirt would have been burned, and perhaps the skin on the chest as well.

Could the wound have been inflicted with this object?

It could. One can't say with certainty that it was, but this object is sufficiently sharp, and thin, to produce a similar wound. It would do very well, thought the doctor. Yes, and death ensued almost immediately. And the rash doctor hurried away.

The prison doctor gave evidence. Polana Hordubalova, according to the usual signs, was in the eighth month of pregnancy.—Accused, said the judge, you need not get up. Who is father of the child which you are expecting?

Juraj, whispered Polana with her eyes on the ground.

Hordubal returned five months ago. With whom then have you the child?

Polana remained silent.

Old Manya declined to give evidence, Stepan buried his face in his hands; the old man dried his tears in his red handkerchief. By the way, Manya, do you recognize this object?

Old Manya nodded. Oh, it's our needle, it's for making baskets. He was pleased, and would have liked to put it in his pocket. No, no, my good man, it must stay here.

Michal and Dula also declined to give evidence. Marja Janos was called. Do you wish to give evidence? Yes. Is it true that your brother Stepan asked your husband to murder Juraj Hordubal? It is true, your honour, but my husband—not even for a hundred oxen, he said. Did Stepan have relations with the accused? Eh, he had, he himself boasted of it at home. Stepan is a bad man, your honour. It was not good to betroth him to a child; God be praised that nothing came of it.—And was your brother very angry when Hordubal threw him out? Marja crossed herself: Ah, Lord, like a devil: he wouldn't eat, or drink, or even smoke.—The witness

stood down, and at the door she cried: What a shame, your honour.—May I leave this money to help Stepan?—No, no, woman, there's no need of money, go with God.

Janos was called. Do you wish to give evidence? As you wish, your honour. Is it true that Stepan asked you to murder Hordubal? The witness was embarrassed and blinked his eyes. It is true that he said something about it. You are poor, he said, you would earn some money.—And what were you to do for the money?—How do I know, your honour, such silly talk.—Did he tell you to kill Hordubal?—No, I should not say so, your honour. It's a long time ago. It was only a talk about money. Why should I carry such stupid things in my head? And I'm a fool, he said. A fool, well perhaps a fool, but it won't bring me to the gallows, my lad.—Aren't you drunk, my man?—I am, your honour; I had a glass to give me courage; it's not easy to talk to you gentlemen.

The trial was then adjourned until the next day. Stepan's eyes sought Polana's, but Hordubal's widow looked as if carved out of ivory, as if she did not know of him: bony, unattractive, wooden. No one

looked at Stepan, only at her. Him, a dark-looking lout! Is it seldom that one fellow kills another? But this—his own wife, I ask you, what a life if you can't even trust your own wife! Even at home in bed you can't feel safe, they'll stick you like a pig. Hordubal's widow passed through a corridor of hate which closed behind her like water. Eh, with a stake he ought to have beaten her to death, like a wolf when it's caught in a trap. She ought to hang, said the women. There's no justice in the world if she's not hanged. Oh, get on with you, you old hens, growled the men, women, you know, are not hanged, lock her up for life.—If women judged they'd hang the bitch, for certain I'd put the rope round her neck myself.—Don't you talk, Manka, it's not a woman's job. But they'll certainly string Stepan up.

Yes, yes, Stepka; and he didn't kill one of his own family. If they don't hang Polana, won't women soon be killing their husbands? Any woman might get it into her head—in a family, my friends, in the married state, there's no lack of reasons. No, no, she ought to be hanged. And how can they hang her when she's expecting a baby? That, that will be no baby, it will be the devil himself.

Simon Fazekas called Leca was called to give evidence. He saw Polana standing with Stepan on the day when the murderer took place, behind the brook. Stepan Manya, do you still decline to admit that on that day you were in Kriva, and talked with Polana Hordubalova?—I was not there.—Accused, did Manya talk with you behind the brook?—He did not.—But you told the policemen that he did.—The policemen forced me.

Juliana Varvarinova, Hordubals' neighbour, made her statement. Yes, she used to see Hordubal, he walked about like a body without a soul. Polana would not cook for him, after he had sacked Stepan, but she used to cook chickens and young pigs for the farm worker. She slept with Manya every night, may God not punish her, the neighbour spat out,—but when Hordubal returned who knows where she met the farm worker; she never set foot in the stable again. In the last few days Hordubal even used to go round at night and shine a light everywhere, as if he were keeping watch.

And listen, witness, you saw Hordubal throw Stepan over the fence. Had Stepan his coat on then? He had not, he was only in his trousers and shirt.

And did he go away without the coat? Yes, your honour. So this coat which he is wearing now must have been left behind with his things at Hordubals'? Stepan Manya, when did you go back to Kniva for this coat?

Stepan stood up, and blinked uncertainly.

You took it away the night that Juraj Hordubal was murdered. You can sit down. And the public prosecutor made a note with an air of having won a victory.

Take both the accused away, commanded the president of the court, as Hafia Hordubalova was called to give evidence.

A blue-eyed, pretty little girl was brought in, there was a breathless silence.

You needn't be afraid, little one, come here, said the president of the court, paternally. If you don't want to you needn't give evidence. Do you wish to make any statement?

The girl stared and looked questioningly at the learned gentlemen in gowns

Do you wish to give evidence? Hafia nodded obediently. Yes.

Was your mother in the habit of going into the

stable when Stepan was there? Ye-es, every night. Did you see them together sometimes? I did, once Uncle Stepan held her in his arms, and threw her down in the straw. And what about the farmer, your daddy, was he sometimes with your mother? No, not daddy, only Uncle Stepan. And when your father returned from America did your mother go to your uncle? Hafia shook her head. And how do you know? Because my father was at home, said the child quietly with experience. But Uncle Stepan used to say that he would not stay here, that everything was different.

Was your father good? Hafia shrugged her shoulders in embarrassment. And Stepan? Oh, Stepan was good. Was your mother good to your father? No. And to you? did she like you? She only liked Uncle Stepan. Did she cook for him well? She did, but he used to give me some of it. And who did you like best? The girl wriggled shyly. Uncle Stepan.

And what happened, Hafia, that evening when your daddy died? Where did you sleep? With mammy, in the room. Did anything wake you? It did. Somebody knocked at the window, and mammy

sat up on the bed. What happened next? Next, nothing, mammy said that I ought to sleep, or did I want to get a spanking. And did you sleep? Yes, I did. And didn't you hear anything more? Nothing. Only somebody was walking in the yard, and mammy was gone. And who was walking—do you know? The girl opened her mouth with astonishment. Why, Stepan. Who else would mammy be with?

A silence fell on the court so painful that it was difficult to get one's breath. There will be an interval, commanded the president hurriedly, and he himself led out Hafia by the hand. You are a good little girl, he mumbled, good and sensible; but you should be glad that you don't understand what it's about. The jury searched in their pockets for something to give Hafia, they pressed round her, patted her, and stroked her hair.

And where's Stepan? inquired Hafia in a silvery voice. And here was the fat Gelnaj, he puffed and made his way to Hafia: Come, little one, come, I'm going to take you home. But the corridors were full of people, who gave Hafia, this one an apple, that one an egg, or a piece of cake, they snuffed into their handkerchiefs, and shed copious tears. Hafia kept

tight hold of Gelnaj's fat finger, and she was near to crying herself; but Gelnaj said, Don't cry, I'll buy you some toffee, and she jumped with pleasure.

The trial proceeded; sometimes as if it had run into a knot, which several hands had to unravel. Pjosa called Husar gave evidence, Alexa Vorobec Demetrov, and his wife, Anna, and the wife of Kobyla Herpak, gave evidence about the woman, Polana Hordubalova. Ah, God, what things people know of others, it's a shame; the Lord need not pass judgment, people judge. And a man called Misa, a shepherd, asked permission to make a statement. Come here, witness, you need not take the oath.

What?

You need not take the oath. How old are you?

What?

How old are you, Misa?

Oh, I don't know. What does it matter? In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Juraj Hordubal asked me to give a message that his wife was good and faithful.

Wait, Misa, what message did he send? When did he tell you that?

Oh, when—well, I don't know. It rained then.

He told me to tell them. You, Misa, they'll believe you.

God be with you, my man, and you came all the way from Kriva for this?

What?

You can go, Misa, we don't want you any more.

Oh, thank you God bless you.

Farkas the glazier gave evidence. Stepan Manya bought the glass-cutter from me. And do you know him? Why not, it's that one there, the yellow one. Stand up, Manya; do you admit that you bought this glass-cutter from Farkas the glazier? I do not. You may sit down, Manya, but you won't help yourself like this.

Baran's wife gave evidence, Hryca's wife, and Fedor Bobal's wife. What a shame, Polana, eh! They point their fingers at you, they tell of your unchastity, women stone the woman caught in adultery. No one looks at Stepan Manya now, in vain you cover your pregnant womb with your crossed hands, you can't cover your sin; Stepan killed, but you sinned. Look at her, the hussy, she doesn't even bow her head, she doesn't cry, she doesn't prostrate

herself and touch the ground with her head, she looks as if she wanted to say: go on, talk, talk, what does it matter to me?

Accused, have you anything to say against the statement of Marta Bobalova?

I have not. And she did not bow her head, she did not blush with shame, she did not fall down with dishonour: like a statue.

Are there any more witnesses? Very well, the trial is adjourned until to-morrow. But that little Hafia gave her evidence very nicely, didn't she? Such a baby, my friend, and what an experience she's had already! Dreadful, dreadful. And yet her evidence —like a clear stream flowing. So matter-of-fact in everything—as if there was nothing amiss in what she were saying. But the whole village is against Polana. It's a bad case for Polana; for Stepan, of course, as well, but why worry about Stepan—a subordinate figure? Yes, yes, the village has come to understand that a question of morals is at stake, my friend. You might say, the people of Kriva are avenging an order which has been violated. Strange, usually, when this and that happens in a family, people don't take it so seriously, do they? It seems

as if Polana did not only commit adultery but something worse as well. What do you say? Well, an offence against the community; so she incurred the hostility of the village.

Be cursed, Polana! Haven't you all seen, how she carried her head? That she felt no shame! She even smiled when Fedor Bobal's wife said that the women wanted to smash her windows for her adultery. Yes, her head still higher, and she smiled as if she had something to be proud of. Oh, go on, uncle, I should like to see her myself, then; and is she nice, looking? I hope God doesn't punish me, nice-looking! She must have cast a spell over Stepan, I say, she must have blinded his eyes; thin, I tell you, and her eyes—only to stab with, she must be evil, I think. But the child, like a picture, we all cried—when one thinks of her, an orphan! And you see, even before the child that woman wasn't ashamed, she committed adultery before her own daughter. Well, a devil, I say. Oh, you ought to go and see her, uncle!

Let us in, let us in, we want to see her, the huzzy! Oh, well, we'll keep together, and stand as if we were in church, but do let us in! Don't push so much,

you people, your fur coats will make the noble court stink! Get away from that door!

Look at that one sitting up so straight and gaunt, that's her. Really, who'd ever say it was her? She looks just like any ordinary woman. And where's Stepan? Oh, you can only see his shoulders. And the one who's just getting up, the tall one in the gown, he's the public prosecutor himself. Silence, silence, now you will hear something.

Gentlemen of the jury, I have gone through the facts of the situation as they were ascertained by the exemplary work of the police (in the body of the court Biegl prodded Gelnaj), and as they emerged in the statements of the witnesses. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking them all. Gentlemen, in my long career I have never attended a trial in which the statements of the witnesses were imbued with such a deep, such a passionate devotion to the cause of justice as in this case. The whole village, the whole population of Kriva, men, women, and children, came before you, not only to give evidence, but to complain to God, and to man, of an adulterous woman. It is not I in the name of the law, but the people themselves who are the prosecutors, and

plaintiffs. According to the letter of the law you are going to judge a crime. According to the conscience of these, God's people, you are going to judge a sin.

The public prosecutor was certain of his case, but at that moment he hesitated. (Why do I talk about sin? Do we try the souls of men, or only their deeds? Only deeds, that's true—but do not deeds spring from the soul? Eh, mind the blind alleys! After all, the case is so simple——) Gentlemen of the jury, the case which you have to decide is clear, terribly clear in its simplicity. You have here only three persons. The first is the farmer Juraj Hordubal, a simple man, a good fellow, perhaps with a rather weak mind. He worked hard in America, he earned five to six dollars a day, four of which he sent to his family, to his wife, so that she could have an easier life. The voice of the public prosecutor acquired a strange throaty sharpness. And this money, earned with blood and sweat, the woman gave to—a young farm worker, who had no scruples in being kept as the paramour of an ageing mistress. Would Stepan stop at anything for money! He broke up the home of the emigrant, he estranged the mother

from her child, and prompted by his mistress, he killed the sleeping husband for a bag of money. What a crime—what a sin of avarice! (The public prosecutor paused. Crime, not sin. This isn't God's judgment.)

And then here is—this woman. As you see her, cold, calculating, hard. Between her and the young farmer there could be no affection, not even sinful love; only lust, only sin, only sin.—She sustained the instrument of her lust, she pampered him, not even for her own daughter did she care. God touched her with his finger; in her sin she became pregnant. And then the husband returned from America, God himself sent him to punish the adultery in his house. But Juraj was weak; no one of us, no other man would, I hope, have borne in silence what this man suffered, this weak-minded husband who perhaps only wanted to have peace in this home. But with his coming the flood of dollars stopped, the mistress had no longer the means with which to retain the favour of a young ne'er-do-well. Stepan Manya left the service of sin; and then the incomprehensible weakling, Hordubal, undoubtedly under the instigation of his wife, himself offered him the hand of his

little daughter, he offered him money and his farm if he would return. . . .

The public prosecutor felt himself choking with disgust. And even that was not enough. It seems that Stepan sponged on him and threatened him. Then at last, even the poor victim could bear no more, and he threw the good-for-nothing out of his house, but from that moment he was afraid for his life, and he looked for work anywhere on the other side of the hills, at night he went round with a lantern and kept watch. The vile plan, however, was ready, the old peasant was too much in the way of the base woman and the greedy workman; adultery and avarice combined against him. The victim fell ill, he could not keep guard, and could not defend himself; the following morning he was found stabbed through the heart. He was killed while he was asleep.

And is this the end? The public prosecutor seemed surprised himself; he had a splendid and eloquent peroration ready, but somehow it stuck in his throat, and suddenly snap, the end; he sat down, and he himself did not know how it had come about. He glanced inquiringly at the president of the court, he seemed to nod and acquiesce; the jury swallowed

something in their throats, they sniffed, and wiped their noses, and two began to cry openly. The public prosecutor sighed with relief.

Manya's counsel stood up, a big man, and a barrister with a great reputation. The public prosecutor, at the end of his able speech, appealed to the heart of Juraj Hordubal. Allow me, gentlemen of the jury, to begin the defence of my client with this same heart. And as night follows day it's clear that the prosecution itself admits that there are discrepancies in the expert evidence. Was the heart of Hordubal stabbed through or shot? Was the instrument of murder that inconspicuous needle belonging to Manya, or a gun carried by some person unknown? For myself I incline to the view of the learned scientific expert who with absolute certainty speaks of a gun of the smallest calibre. Well, gentlemen, if Juraj Hordubal was shot, the perpetrator of the deed was not Stepan Manya. And so on: step by step the famous barrister tore the body of evidence to shreds, and emphasized each point with his fat hand. There is not one single piece of evidence incriminating my client, it is all circumstantial. I do not appeal to the feelings of the noble jury, I am sure that on the

evidence brought before them by the prosecution, and what has emerged during the trial, they cannot find Stepan Manya guilty. And the famous barnister sat down victoriously and with deliberation.

As if one had pressed a button, a new black figure sprang up, Polana Hordubalova's counsel, a young and handsome man. There was not one single bit of direct evidence against his client which suggested that she had been an accomplice in the murder of Juraj Hordubal, it had all been deduced from suggestions, from circumstances, and from hypothetical interrelations. Gentlemen of the jury, those interrelations are founded on the supposition that Polana Hordubalova had a motive for desiring the death of her husband, that is to say that she was unfaithful to him. Gentlemen, I pray you: if conjugal infidelity were a sufficient motive for murder—how many men, how many women, here in the town, in the village, in Kriva itself, would now be alive? Rather let that go; but I ask you, how do we know that Polana Hordubalova committed adultery? All the people of the village, it's true, have made their way here, and given evidence against the accused. But, gentlemen, pause and think: which of us is safe against

one's next, and one's neighbours? Do each of you realize what the others say of you? Perhaps even worse things than of this unhappy woman; no integrity can protect you against lying and dishonourable gossip. The prosecution did not deny itself one witness who was jealous and brave enough to disgrace a defenceless woman——

On behalf of the witnesses I wish to protest against this insinuation, interrupted the public prosecutor.

It is not in order, said the president of the court. I trust that it will not be repeated.

The nice-looking little fellow made a polite and sprightly bow. As you please. We have heard the witnesses who have had something to say against Polana Hordubalova. But the court forgot to call one witness for this woman, I should like to call him the crown witness; that is the murdered man, Juraj Hordubal.

The nice-looking little fellow waved a sheet of paper in the air. Gentlemen of the jury, ten days before his death, Juraj Hordubal, the farmer from Kriva, made his last will and testament. And in it, as if he had a premonition that his voice would be needed, he ordered this to be written (in a high-

pitched voice charged with emotion the young counsel read) All my property movable; and immovable I bequeath to my wife, Polana, *née* Durkotova, for her fidelity and conjugal love. Note, gentlemen, if you please—For her fidelity and conjugal love! This is the testament of Juraj Hordubal, this is his testimony. You have heard Misa the herdsman say that Hordubal himself wished to let you know that Polana was a good and faithful wife. I was—I admit—surprised at Misa's statement; it sounded to me like a voice from the other side of the grave. Here you have a written testimony, the testimony of the only man who really knew Polana. The farm worker, Manya, boasted to his sister that, he said, he had had relations with his mistress. So it appears from the farm worker's statement, and so (here he struck the paper with his hand) it appears from the statement which her husband made before God. Gentlemen, it is for you to decide which of these two you are to believe.

The young counsel thoughtfully lowered his head. If by this the charge of adultery against my client falls to the ground, no motive remains for which she should be rid of her husband. You may object that she is in the eighth month of pregnancy; but

gentlemen, I can refer you to several medical authorities to show how fallacious the determination of the stage of pregnancy may be. And the bright little fellow rattled off a number of authorities and scientific views. Manya's experienced counsel shook his head. That ruins his case, the jury don't like scientific arguments; but that with the will was pretty clever. Just imagine, gentlemen of the jury, that you find Polana Hordubalova guilty, and that the child of Juraj Hordubal, a living testimony of fidelity and conjugal love, is born in prison, branded as the child of an adulterous mother. By everything that is holy I warn you, gentlemen of the jury: do not commit an error of justice against an unborn child.

The nice-looking little fellow sat down and mopped his brow with a perfumed handkerchief. Congratulations, muttered the old warrior of the court into his ear, it wasn't at all bad. But now the public prosecutor rose for his final speech. His face was flushed, and his hands trembled. If a child, then a child, he ejaculated hoarsely. Counsel for the defence, the child of Juraj Hordubal, Hafia, has given evidence. Her statement you will hardly call—(with his fist on the table)—gossip. At least I hope

not. (The nice-looking fellow bowed and shrugged his shoulders.) After all, I am grateful to you for producing the last will and testament of Juraj Hordubal. That alone was necessary (the public prosecutor straightened himself up as if he were growing) for us to form a complete picture of the character of this woman, almost diabolic, who—who already had the plan prepared to do to death her dull, good-natured weakling of a husband—and still she thought out the last subtle point of her plot: to compel the poor fellow to leave to her alone, to her alone, everything he possessed—and still give her what amounts to a moral alibi—for her fidelity and conjugal love! And the good man obediently went—so that not one penny should come to little Hafia, but to her, Jezebel, so that she could pay her lover, and wallow in sin.—The public prosecutor choked with passionate indignation.—This is no longer a trial, in very truth it is God's judgment over the sins of the world.—The tense and laboured breathing of the devout people in front of him was clearly audible.—And now a bright light has fallen on the case of Juraj Hordubal. The cold, calculating, cynical will which was able to induce the hand of the illiterate

Juraj to make three crosses under this ghastly and incriminating document—the same dreadful will, gentlemen, inspired the hand of Stepan Manya—the murderer. This little village paramour was not only an instrument of adultery—he also became an instrument of murder. This woman is guilty, cried the public prosecutor, making a violent gesture and pointing at her. That testament convicts her—only the devil himself could have thought out that hellish sneer—for her fidelity and conjugal love! Jezebel Hordubalova, do you admit at last that you murdered Juraj Hordubal?

Polana raised herself, livid, ungainly with pregnancy, and moved her silent lips.

Don't tell them anything, someone said harshly and hastily. I'll tell them myself. Stepan Manya stood up, his face awry with the mental strain. Hon . . . honourable judge, he stammered, and suddenly he was seized with a violent fit of sobbing.

Rather taken aback the public prosecutor bowed in his direction. Please calm yourself, Stepan. The court will gladly hear what you have to say.

It—it was—sobbed Stepan—me.—I only wanted revenge—for—for—because he threw me over the

fence—and the people laughed at me! I couldn't even sleep—I had to do something to him—I had—to have my revenge—That's why I went—

Did the mistress open the door for you? inquired the president.

No—she didn't—she didn't know anything. . . . I, in the evening—nobody saw me—Hordubal slept in the parlour—and I went to the loft—and hid there—

In the body of the court Biegl excitedly prodded Gelnaj. But that's not true, he blustered—he couldn't get into the loft, the door was held down with maize! I was there the first thing in the morning, Gelnaj! I'm going to tell them—

Sit still, growled Gelnaj, holding Biegl down. You ass, don't you dare!

And at night, stammered Stepan, wiping his nose and eyes, at night I crawled down—into the parlour—Hordubal was asleep—and I killed him with the needle—it didn't—didn't want to go into him—and he didn't—didn't move—Stepan staggered, and the attendant handed him a glass of water from the president's table. Stepan drank gratefully and copiously, and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

And then I cut the hole in the window—and took the money—to make it look as if burglars—and—back to the loft—and out by the window. Stepan gasped. And then I knocked at the window—for the mistress—to tell her that I had come for my coat.

Polana Hordubalova, is that true?

Polana rose, her lips were pressed together. No, it's not, he didn't knock—

The mistress doesn't know anything about it, broke in Stepan. And it's not true that she had relations with me. Once—ye-es, once I wanted to throw her down on the straw, but she defended herself—and Hafia came. And then nothing, nothing more—

That's good, Stepan, said the public prosecutor, bending forward. But I have one question more to ask. Up till now it was not necessary. Polana Hordubalova, is it true that before this Stepan here you had another lover, the farm worker Pavel Drevota?

Polana faltered and gasped, raised her hand to her forehead, and the attendant half led her, half carried her out.

The trial is adjourned, announced the president;

on account of the new points revealed by the confession of Siepan Manya, the court will meet tomorrow at the place where the deed was committed.

Biegl waited in Hordubals' yard for the noble court to arrive. And then the distinguished gentlemen drove up. Biegl saluted, solemn and erect, the people stood watching in the road behind the fence, gazing into the Hordubals' yard, as if God knows what might appear—a great day for the policeman.

Biegl led the noble court to the loft. The loft is just as it was, nobody has set foot in it since the day of the murder. Even then the door was held down with maize; if anybody had tried to push it up the maize would have fallen down here on the steps. And Biegl pushed against the door, the heap gave way, and down fell a stream of maize. If the gentlemen will kindly go up, said Biegl politely. In the loft was all God's blessing from the plain, heaps of reddish maize, one felt like wading and jumping in it. And this is the little window; so Manya went out this way, he said—

But this window is latched on the inside, a mem-

ber of the jury discovered, and looked round importantly. If nobody has been here since the day of the murder Manya could not have got out this way.

That's true, he couldn't; on the window-sill here there are bottles and tins covered with years of dust, these farmers never throw anything away! If Manya had crawled out this way he would have moved this rubbish away first, wouldn't he?

Yes, of course he would have to. And what's outside, under this window?

The parlour where Hordubal was killed, and the little garden in front of the house. Will the gentlemen kindly go and look there as well? The noble court betook itself with dignity to the little garden. One of the lower windows had been taken out: This is where the opening was made in the glass. Just above us is that little window in the loft through which Manya jumped out, so he says. I searched here immediately after the murder, said Biegl modestly, and below the window there was not a single footprint; there was a flower bed, freshly dug, and it had rained just before——

The president of the court appreciated the point

and nodded. It's obvious that Stepan is lying. But perhaps you ought to have gone and looked in the loft immediately after the murder.

Biegl brought his heels together. Your honour, I did not want to disturb the maize. But to make certain I nailed down the door so that nobody could get in. I only took them out this morning. I tied a piece of thread on the door——

Good, good, mumbled the president, now satisfied. You thought of everything, mister, mister——

Biegl puffed out his chest. The assistant policeman Biegl.

Another gracious nod. Among us, gentlemen, there is no doubt that Stepan Manya lied. But now we are here perhaps it would interest you to look into the parlour.

From the table a big, broad-shouldered, heavy farmer stood up; they were just having dinner. This, if you please, is Mechajl Hordubal, the late farmer's brother; he is managing the farm at present.

Mechajl Hordubal bowed deeply to the gentlemen. Oxena, Hafsa, quick and bring chairs for the gentlemen.

There's no need, my man, no need. And why

haven't you had a new window put in here? It lets the cold in.

And why buy a new window, I ask you? The window is at the court, it would be a pity to buy a new one.

So, hm. And I see you are taking care of Hafia here. She's a clever girl, look after her well, the orphan. And this—your wife, isn't she?

Yes, your honour, Demetr Varivodjuk Ivanov's daughter, from Magurica.

And you are expecting a baby, I see.

Well, if God gives, His name be praised.

And—do you like it here in Kriva?

Well, yes, said Mechajl and waved his hand. If you'll excuse me, do you think I could get to America to find work, your honour?

Like Juraj?

Yes, like Juraj, God grant him eternal peace. And farmer Mechajl accompanied the departing gentry to the gate.

The noble court returned to town. Gee up, little horses, gee up, you bring an important load.

And the village looked like Bethlehem, just like Bethlehem.

The president leaned towards the public prosecutor. It's not late yet, we could get it through by evening, perhaps there won't be so many speeches as there were yesterday——

The public prosecutor blushed faintly. I don't know myself what came over me yesterday. I spoke as if I were in a trance, as if I were not an official but an avenger—I just wanted to preach and thunder.

It was as if we were in church, said the president thoughtfully. You know those people in the court didn't even breathe. A strange people. I felt it myself: that we were passing sentence on something graver than crime, that we were judging sin—Praise be to God, to-day the court will be empty; no sensation, it will go smoothly.

It went smoothly. To the question if Stepan Manya was guilty of the crime of murder committed against Juraj Hordubal, eight of the jury answered yes, and four answered no.

And to the question if Polana Hordubalova was

guilty of being a party to the said murder, all twelve answered yes.

In accordance with the verdict of the jury the court condemns Stepan Manya to penal servitude for life,

And Polana Hordubalova, *née* Durkotova, to penal servitude for the period of twelve years.

Polana stood lifeless, holding her head high; Stepan Manya sobbed violently.

Take them away!

The heart of Juraj Hordubal was lost somewhere, and was never buried.



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